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AN

IMPARTIAL EXPOSITION

OF THE

EVIDENCES AND DOCTRINES

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

ADDRESSED TO THE BETTER EDUCATED CLASSES OF SOCIETY.

BY J. H. McCULLOH, Jr. M. D.

*Author of "Researches, Philosophical and Antiquarian, concerning the Aboriginal History
of America."*



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TO THOMAS E. BOND, M. D.

DEAR SIR:

The compliment of this dedication is due to you above all my other friends and acquaintance. Not only has our intercourse for above twenty years been to me of the most grateful kind, but I am indebted to you for important suggestions and corrections of opinion of no small value and interest. Though we do not concur in every particular of belief, our friendship has never been disturbed by that circumstance, and you will perceive, on examining the ensuing pages, that, on more than one subject, your influence has induced modifications of statement and expression, that I trust will be more beneficial to general readers than what I had previously advanced in our familiar conversation.

I am,

With respect and esteem,

J. H. McCULLOH, Jr. M. D.

Baltimore, Dec. 4th, 1835.

PREFACE.

WHEN I first undertook to write the following Essay I had no intention whatever of making it public. I was solely influenced by the suggestions of parental solicitude to prepare something that should assist my own children to the better comprehension of a subject which I deemed of all others the most important. But when the work was nearly finished, it seemed to me that its publication could not but have a beneficial influence at the present time, when the institutions of the civilized world, seem to be on the eve of a great change in which new opinions must subvert ancient prejudices, and society be regulated by a theory of principles very different from those which have hitherto influenced the interests of mankind. Under such an impression I resolved to publish the work in which I was engaged, and which only required me to suppress or change a phraseology addressed to my own children into forms of speech suitable to persons who would not regard my opinions under any influence of filial prepossession.

The first principles of the Christian religion are necessarily received by children in prejudices which are strengthened by the example of those around them. But as they advance in life, the time arrives when every intellectual person must determine by his own perception of truth, and on his own responsibility, whether he will obey the gospel of Jesus Christ or not. This important determination for the most part forces itself on young men when they are most exposed to the temptations of life, and when surrounded by companions not only indifferent, but in too many instances directly hostile to the theory and obligations of the Christian religion.

To meet this eventful period of early manhood,—this moral crisis of intellectual life, the following pages have been written. They are especially addressed to those who have had the benefit of a liberal education, who have seen the first novelty of adult life pass away, and who are, or ought to be, able to assign the reasons why they believe or reject any subject of philosophical speculation.

I have never considered my readers to be either atheists or deists, but simply as being more or less sceptical concerning the divine constitution of the Christian religion, and but imperfectly acquainted with the true doctrinal principles of our religious faith. Under this supposition I have attempted to vindicate the divine appointment of Christianity, to exhibit the simplicity of its doctrinal requirements, and to expose the defective reasoning employed by the atheists and deists on the more important controverted points.

I have rarely departed from this plan of confining my expositions to the sceptical or to the half instructed of the better educated classes of society—but on two or three occasions, I have extended my discourse upon certain points of perplexed or important consideration, under the hope that my views upon such subjects, may not be uninteresting, even to those who are the best instructed in the principles of the Christian faith.

It is perhaps needless to observe that in attempting to make this work of but moderate size, I have been greatly restricted in the exposition of my views. Several of the subjects that I have but briefly introduced, have an immense influence and would require long discussions to show their actual importance. Though I have attempted to exhibit such matters in their strongest points of view, yet I may have made a false estimate of them, or may not have urged them as clearly as I ought to have done. If I am entitled to any indulgence, it is on the ground that I had more materials than I knew how to dispose of properly; so that possibly from fear of writing too much, I

may have omitted what was necessary to a clearer exposition of my subject.

In attempting to appreciate the possible reception of this discourse by the Christian public, I cannot but be aware that many persons may be startled and some offended by the views I have taken and the arguments I have urged. But though I shall be distressed if any honest, good man be offended through my mis-judgment of things, yet I cannot hesitate a single moment to express what I think correct in the most unequivocal language, though I have used my utmost efforts to do so with courtesy and charity. As I have undertaken to vindicate the truth of a system which involves the dearest interests of mankind, whether for time or eternity, so I cannot but speak in such a manner that my own conscience shall not reproach me with having handled the message of God deceitfully, or having been guilty in any degree of the smallest suppression of truth.

With my mind filled from all quarters with recollections of human presumption, weakness, and mis-judgment, and conscious of my own infirmity and liability to error, I cannot hesitate to express myself fearful lest I may have advanced certain things improperly or incorrectly in the ensuing pages; should this be the case, I trust I shall be found not only willing, but anxious to make ample reparation for any error into which I may have fallen, and to recommend the adoption of better views and opinions. On this subject, however, I can mistrust nothing at the present time. I have from the commencement of this work been fully aware of the responsibility which I had assumed, and therefore have diligently exerted myself not only to ascertain what was true, but I have to the utmost aimed to be faithful in the annunciation of that truth.

INTRODUCTION.

To a person who has either imperfect or erroneous views concerning the theory of the Christian Religion, nothing seems more perplexing than the fact, that notwithstanding its continued triumph over the civilized world for more than eighteen hundred years, that a keen controversy should still exist among intellectual men, whether it be that system of divine appointment for which its advocates have so long contended.

This circumstance, however, involves no difficulty of explanation, for this discrepancy of opinion is one of the inseparable peculiarities of the system, and must ever so continue until the consummation of our earthly condition. Christianity, according to its express theory, is a system addressed to men as free agents of limited capacities, who are undergoing intellectual and moral probation under its peculiar appointments: as long, therefore, as the system so exists, so long will men differ in their opinion concerning its truth or its merits. The theory of Christianity most distinctly implies, that every individual shall be judged hereafter, in his own personal responsibilities. Every one, therefore, must determine for himself, both the truth and the particular obligations of the system, and if any one will consider the moral constitution of things around him, he will perceive it to be impossible to escape from incurring this individual responsibility; for, judge or determine he must by his own act, whether he accepts, rejects, or doubts on the subject. No one is impelled in any manner to adopt any opinion on the subject, contrary to the approbation of his own judgment. Whatever course, therefore, the individual does take, he incurs the responsibility of his own free judgment or choice, and for this he will have to account hereafter.*

* It is a remarkable mistake among the majority of men, to consider that the natural condition of the human mind is that of *unbelief*.

The natural condition of the human mind is *ignorance*; it knows nothing.

As the theological or ethical obligations of Christianity are addressed to men as intelligent creatures, capable of unlimited intellectual improvement, so the truth of the system and the extent of its obligations must be continually appreciated, under the augmented light of every successive century. The matured adult does not differ more from the boy in his judgment upon philosophical subjects than the philosophy of one century differs from another, and hence as the Christian religion has been appointed to every age of time, and every intellectual condition of men, so it must be evident that every increase of knowledge, enlarges or varies the ground of controversy concerning the merits of the system, according as a judicious or injudicious application is made of any new discovered principle of truth or science.

As it must be clear that with every increase of knowledge, we become more capable of judging correctly, so the advocates or the enemies of Christianity become *ipso facto*, more discerning, as to the value of the evidences produced in its favor, or of those objections that are urged against its claims. Thus new views are continually suggested, which, after having been sufficiently discussed, at last receive a value either as evidence, or objection more or less important. Therefore, since God has made mankind intellectual and moral creatures, to undergo probation before him, in their individual capacities,—as long as human nature shall continue under that constitution, so long it must be evident that we shall be under the influence of those particular causes that affect our understanding and excite our free agency. Our probation under the theory of Christianity, does not consist in the degree of our knowledge or attainments, but in the honest use of the knowledge, the talents, the means, the advantages which we do possess. Thus under the scheme of probation, there is no difficulty in explaining the fact, why individuals, whether of small or great intellectual powers, should continually differ in their opinion concerning the truth and obligations of the Christian religion.*

The second stage of advancement is that of scepticism or doubtfulness, when a man, after a certain amount of investigation, is unable to determine whether he ought to believe, or disbelieve. If, at a future time, he professes to believe, he must be able to *justify that belief*, and if he disbelieves, he must be able to *justify that unbelief*. This must be evident to every one that will reflect for a moment. A subject may be involved with difficulties, so that it may be impossible for one to decide whether it is to be believed or not, but if a man does disbelieve, *his act is as positive as the act of him that does believe*, and by parity of reason he must justify his unbelief. For why does he not believe?

*As it is possible for some ignorant conceited person to suppose that his

The great feature of Christianity is, that it is a *probationary system*; and though every one must acknowledge this to be the fact, yet this eminent peculiarity of the system appears in a remarkable manner to be almost entirely forgotten in the systematic speculations on the subject of its divine appointment, whether as made by Christian or deist, and in consequence of which, great error and confusion has prevailed in their general discourses on this subject.

The deists in an especial manner have disregarded the subject of probation as involved in the constitution of the Christian religion, urging against it this query instead of argument: Why should God wish to prove us? Surely all things from the beginning to the end, are known to him, and it is therefore absurd to suppose he can

incredulity of the Christian religion may be justifiable under such an expression as the above; I beg leave to observe, that I by no means admit that the unbelief of the ordinary class of infidels upon this subject, is to be considered of the least rationality. Their unbelief does not depend upon any comparison of the value of conflicting arguments, but upon some presumptuous conceit excited by their pride or sensuality, which they maintain without either sense or reason. Such persons having assumed some position or other contrary to Christianity, in the self-sufficiency of complacent ignorance, justify themselves by the inability of their opponents *to prove the negative* to their unwarrantable assumption. To do this is indeed impossible, not only on this subject, but upon any other subject of human speculation, and the dullest understanding may appreciate the absurdity of such a requirement, if he will only make it his business *to disprove* the opinion of an opponent.

No man can be called rational in his notions who is not able to justify *his own doctrine* by a greater or less amount of good argument, and no one can be deemed either capable or honest, who is unable to state what are the strongest positions of his opponent, as well as concede to them the force to which they are entitled.

I know of no surer method of exposing the ignorant presumption of the lower order of infidels, than of asking these "men of reason," as they ludicrously term themselves, What they consider to be the strongest evidences in favor of Christianity? If a man is ignorant of the true merits of Christianity, he will be so embarrassed and perplexed as to satisfy every one he knows nothing of the subject, and if he should deny that there is any evidence whatever in its favor, as some of them will do,—the presumption of such an ass in casting so gross an imputation on the understanding of the illustrious defenders of Christianity is so egregious that any bystander of the least honesty, however ignorant he may be, can but perceive that such an infidel has affixed the *broad arrow* upon his own capacity or honesty, and as such is totally unqualified to give the least expression of his ignorant presumptions.

The uneducated Christian cannot vindicate, in an able manner, the divine constitution of Christianity. But though they lack learning they can nevertheless appreciate the excellency of the Christian religion. That they should therefore be earnest in its commendation, and sincere in professing it, is very natural. How can they mistrust the Gospel? To do so they must discern in what it is defective, and they must be able to discern the merits of any system that is proposed as its substitute. But Christianity is defective in nothing that regards either the attributes of the Creator or the obligations of human nature; and no system that has been suggested has any comparable excellence. The prejudice therefore of the unlearned Christian is justifiable on the simple ground that it would be irrational to abandon a perfect for an irrational system.

want to prove us, as by his foreknowledge he can anticipate the result. Acting upon such a notion, they insist upon examining Christianity, on the ground that as being an asserted revelation from God to man, so that fact ought to be so distinctly clear and evident, that no one should be able to doubt on the subject.

But surely nothing can be more unreasonable than this notion of the deists, for since Christianity claims as a part of its very constitution, that it is a probationary system, so it is absurd to the last degree to undertake to judge of the system in any other light than the one in which its peculiarity is represented to consist.

Whether Christianity be true or false is another question, but whether it be true or false, the theory of probation is so absolutely involved in its constitution that it is impossible to inquire into its merits or truth, except in relation to a theory which constitutes its very essence, and which alone enables us to appreciate its peculiar features as connected with those intellectual or moral problems which constitute the subjects of our knowledge or speculation.

The proceeding of the deists, therefore, never proposes to ascertain whether God has made a revelation of the Christian religion to mankind, but attempts to show what would have been a better plan, according to their views than the one announced. Upon this subject, we have no opinion; what we are anxious to ascertain is the simple fact, whether Christianity is, or is not of God's appointment.

Many of the Christian writers by losing sight of the fact of our continual probation during life, have seriously injured Christianity by asserting that its truth and evidences are so clear, that none but those who are deficient in integrity of purpose can doubt on the subject. If this statement was true, it would render Christianity no scheme of intellectual or moral probation, but one of simple obedience or disobedience to the literal commandments of God, which it certainly is not.

Seeing therefore the great importance of keeping the fact of our probationary condition constantly before us, let me endeavor to lay this subject before the reader in its true relation to our intellectual constitution under the theory of Christianity.

Probation, as applied to our condition under the appointments of the Christian religion, does not imply as the deists have been pleased to regard this subject, that God is making an experiment on us that he may ascertain whether we would suit some ulterior purpose or

other in his economy. Such a notion is universally opposed by the whole tenor of the Scripture, which ascribes foreknowledge most distinctly to God as one of his attributes. The true import of probation as involved in the theory of Christianity, is conveyed by the term *discipline*, that is to say the probation or discipline that we undergo in our present life, is to operate, not on the Divine mind, but on mankind alone; it is to fit and prepare us through our own free agencies for purposes contemplated by God to take place in eternity, but concerning which we profess absolute ignorance.

Christianity then, as a probationary scheme, has been addressed to mankind as intellectual and moral creatures, free to think or act right, free to think or act wrong, and consistently therewith every particular subject in the physical or intellectual constitution of the world, is subservient to the accomplishment of our moral trial or discipline. Hence, as God has placed man in a condition to undergo such discipline, it is perfectly consistent with such a scheme that he should exhibit all things to us whether moral or physical, constructed with such admixtures of good and evil, of truth and doubtfulness, that we should be compelled as it were to exercise those powers which have been committed to our individual free agency.

If a belief in the existence and providence of God constitutes a part of our intellectual discipline, it is but consistent with that fact, that neither God's existence, nor his providence shall be exhibited to us in such a manner as to preclude all doubt on those subjects. If these particulars were undeniably evident, how could there be any room to exercise free agency under a moral and intellectual constitution.

The same observation applies to all the parts or details of the general system, for instance as respects the Scriptures; if they contain the rule of faith or practice by which our free agency is to be exercised on the scheme of an intellectual and moral self-discipline, it is perfectly consistent with such a system, that their truth, their inspiration, and their authority, should be involved with such circumstances of perplexity and doubtfulness, that all our powers shall be exercised both to understand and to obey their requirements. Was it otherwise, was the truth and inspiration of the scripture writings self-evident, there could be no moral or intellectual exercise on the subject. Who then could disbelieve?

No one must imagine by my preceding observations, that I intend to convey the idea that there is any determined evil mixed up

with the exhibition of God's energy in the constitution of the natural world, or that there is any measure of error or contradiction mingled with the truths of the Scripture, for the purpose of exercising our abilities in the investigation of such subjects. I mean nothing like this; I consider the theory of our probation to consist in this circumstance, that man, a being of limited intellect and capacity, has been partially made acquainted with certain particulars of a great scheme, framed in the infinite wisdom of God, but which is only imperfectly comprehended by man while the system progresses to its ultimate consummation.

Since the theory of our Christian probation arises simply in the disproportion that exists between God's perfect scheme, and our imperfect comprehension of it, it is evident that we ought to ascertain as accurately as possible, our degree of perfection, or our degree of imperfection, be the terms what they may, before we undertake to determine upon those parts of the system which fall legitimately under our inspection, as objects of intellectual investigation.

The absolute importance of ascertaining the actual powers of the human mind, before we embark upon any subject of philosophical speculation, is a point upon which every rational man must be in accord. Every one, whether Christian or deist, is fully sensible that he is a being of limited capacities and powers, whether intellectual or moral. Under this universal admission, it follows necessarily, that we should ascertain, as correctly as possible, how far a man is capable of discerning the truth, and the relation of things to one another? how far can we rationally extend our philosophical speculations, and when should we begin to mistrust our capacities and powers?

Simple as these queries are, and important as every one must confess them to be, where are we to find a satisfactory answer to them. The very first step we make to obtain the required information plunges us at once into abstruse and subtle disquisitions of metaphysical science, which the greater part of mankind can neither comprehend nor follow. Neither can we take any other course to acquire this necessary information, for every species of reasoning is in itself necessarily a metaphysical process, and inevitably will extend itself from the simplest theory of ratiocination to those most abstruse reasonings, employed by the brightest genius of philosophy.*

* It may be possible that some person of limited information may propose to discuss this subject by what he terms *common sense*, a phrase that is in the

Every intellectual operation, however vulgar it may be, is founded on the belief that the human mind has certain capacities and degrees of discernment, with an ability to speculate upon the nature, the causes, and the relation of things; and upon this foundation vulgar and ignorant persons reason and vindicate their opinions by reference to their crude metaphysical estimate of the capacity and power of their intellectual faculties. It therefore must be evident, that the more instructed and discerning that any one becomes on such subjects, so much the more refined and abstruse he must become in his metaphysical speculations concerning the capacity and powers of the human mind.

In calling the reader's attention to this subject, I have not the smallest idea of attempting to communicate any information which shall furnish him with that elementary knowledge by which he shall be enabled to estimate his own powers and capacities. The only object I have in view is to caution the reader not to estimate his capacity and powers to be greater than they really are. The attainment of this knowledge must be from his own study and reflection; it is not to be communicated but through the medium of his own active exertions both long and diligently applied.

It is unfortunately a common mistake among mankind to presume on their capacity and powers without having ever attempted to ascertain their amount or value, and hence a multitude of errors have

mouth of many persons, whenever they find arguments stated above their capacity. But what is this common sense,—does it mean any thing else than the ordinary degree of intelligence possessed by the common class of mankind? But this ordinary degree of intelligence is that of the less educated portion of society; it is sufficient indeed for the common transactions of men among themselves, but certainly it can claim no right to determine on subjects that are above the comprehension of an ordinary education. The common sense of mankind with us, is that amount of light and intelligence, which a plain education has made almost universal among us, and thus it is properly called *common sense*, i. e. *the common amount of intelligence* belonging to our general state of society. But this common sense has no particular degree or standard among mankind in general, it varies with every condition of society, and with every degree of civilization and education. The common sense of the Africans or the Tartars—is not the common sense of the more enlightened people of Europe and America,—it varies and increases with their degree of civilization or education; and no limits can be assigned to its improvement. But in whatever stage it exists, it only means that amount of light and knowledge which is common to a particular society, and whenever we appeal to *common sense* to decide upon any point, we mean nothing else than that the appealed point is so intelligible, that the mere ordinary light and instruction of the general society, in which we are placed, can decide its merits or truth, and that it does not require, any refined or novel proof or argument. But this is not the case with metaphysics in its higher branches, these are studies of themselves; and the common sense of society at large can no more understand them without study and application, than that common sense should, without instruction—make a steam engine, or navigate a ship across the ocean.

prevailed in consequence of men having presumed to judge and determine on subjects they were altogether incapable of appreciating.

But though we cannot pretend to furnish elementary instruction on this subject, it is of importance to speak of it in such a manner, that the reader may discern the value that we have placed on the subject as the result of our individual study.

To ascertain the true amount of the capacities of the human mind, and to determine the ability we have to estimate the truth or relations of things, whether internal or external to ourselves, is not only the most abstruse subject upon which the human mind has ever exercised itself, but we need not hesitate to say, is one that never can be brought to any demonstrable conclusion. This must be evident from the simple fact of our *imperfect nature* by which we are necessarily precluded from arriving at *absolute* truth. We never can exceed our capacities, which as being imperfect, forbids the hope of attaining to any assurance of absolute truth: this is the privilege of those beings alone, who are perfect in their intellectual constitution.

It being then impossible to attain to absolute truth, or what is the same thing, to an absolute assurance of that truth, it is equally evident that we can never estimate our approximation towards absolute truth, unless it may be partially in the greater or less amount of consistency that any particular subject of our investigation preserves in its relations to all other subjects of our knowledge or speculation. Where this consistency is very clear, we have a foundation for a high reliance upon its approximation towards absolute truth, and where it has not that considerable consistency with other subjects of our knowledge we can have little or no reliance on its actual correctness.

But though we neither know, and possibly may never know with absolute assurance, any thing concerning either the existence or the relations of mind or of matter, yet we do acquire a greater or less degree of knowledge concerning them as exhibited to us in their various phenomena, and which have that consistency in their appearance or in their successions, that we learn experience by considering them. Hence it is, that however much a man may mistrust his senses or his understanding, he does acquire an amount of knowledge or experience that enables him to regulate all his proceedings, whether physical or intellectual, by the permanence of phenomena in which all things around him seem to be constituted.

The doubtfulness that is unavoidable in attempting to appreciate the actual value of our perceptions or judgment, has no rational connection with an unbelief in their reality nor in their relations. What we should infer from our doubtfulness is, that we ought to mistrust ourselves so much, as not to maintain our opinions with dogmatism, and to be very slow and deliberate in all our speculations so as to accumulate the best or most probable evidence by which we may regulate our proceedings whether of thought or of action.

I have no doubt that the preceding views may appear startling to some persons at first sight; but, nevertheless, they are true, and the only doctrine that is consistent with the continual improvement that takes place in the human mind, under the advantages of a continually improving age. It by no means throws us into absolute scepticism, but simply places the understanding in that rational condition by which it can always correct its mistakes and attain to a more perfect degree of knowledge. The practical influence of the doctrine is this, believe that to be true which experience, understanding, and conscience approve to be true, and act accordingly. But as we are most undeniably imperfect creatures, there must, therefore, unavoidably exist a greater or less amount of error in all our judgments. If a man will not allow he is liable to err, how can he ever become wiser or better? If a man assumes that he is infallible in his judgment, how can he improve?

As long as we are conscious of growing in wisdom and knowledge, so long must we be convinced that we had been previously in error to a greater or less degree. How then can any one pretend *to assurance* concerning the inferences of his perceptions or intellect, when every day informs us that both we and our fathers have been previously more or less in ignorance or error; and when shall any one ascertain when he is *to cease to mistrust* his amount of knowledge or his accuracy of judgment? But this doubtfulness or mistrust has nothing to do with ethics or Christianity; for whether all things be real or ideal, or whether our notions be imperfect or not, our moral obligations are the same. We are to do whatever we apprehend to be our duty in an honest conscience, and this capability no one was ever insane enough to deny.

As to those hypocritical infidels who affect to cover their disregard of religious or moral obligations by asserting their inability to discern any thing as being true or certain; nothing is more clear than

that they of all men are the least doubtful. Such persons perform all the ordinary duties of citizen, parent, and friend; they judge of what is conducive to their happiness, and avoid, by all judicious procedure, the occurrence of inconvenience or pain. If such a one does all this, and is not hindered from acting through doubts as to the correctness of his perceptions in estimating his interests, I apprehend it must be the grossest hypocrisy to assert that he is unable to discern the truth or value of moral or religious subjects. At this very time such a person steadily follows that particular course that is pleasing to himself, and which without any doubt as to the proceeding necessary to his gratification, he pursues in all consistency of plan and permanence of judgment to the end of his days.

Such a proceeding as this is not the course of one doubtful in his views or opinions; but of one who is certain, for if he really was doubtful there would be vacillation and hesitation in his conduct, and though he might on the whole incline to one course rather than another, yet he would from time to time take an opposite direction. Though there is the greatest room for self-deception in all human thoughts and actions, I cannot but wonder that any one should be so stupid as to suppose they could justify their disregard of moral or religious obligations on the plea of philosophic scepticism as to the accuracy of their perceptions, when by the whole tenor of their proceeding they exhibit the fact of being most positive in their unbelief.*

Having now called the reader's attention to the limited nature of our intellectual capacities and powers, and having sufficiently shown how continually we should mistrust ourselves in all our speculations and judgments, I deem it proper in the next place to make a few re-

* Among the various acts of injustice done to the memory and writings of Hume, there is none more flagrant than the common notion that he taught this doctrine of scepticism as to the reality of our perceptions. To satisfy the reader I make the following extract:

"Should it here be asked me whether I be really one of those sceptics who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possessed of *any* measures of truth or falsehood, I should reply that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. Nature by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine. Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavored by arguments to establish a faculty which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and rendered unavoidable.—*Treatise on Human Nature*, part iv. sec. 1st.

marks concerning the ability we have of acting according to our capacities and powers, be they what they may; or, in other words, to inquire whether is man a free agent, acting by his own will, or whether is he under the influences of other principles that deprive him of liberty and force him to act by necessity?

The controversy on the subject of liberty or necessity I apprehend is capable of a very simple resolution, however much the subject has been perplexed by the speculations of those, who, under cover of this question, propose to vindicate some mode of life that they are desirous of maintaining. This object though artfully kept out of sight in the controversy, has, nevertheless, suggested every position they take on the subject of liberty or necessity.

It is sufficiently evident to every one, that man is a being of limited power and capacity. We are surrounded on all sides with objects whether physical or intellectual, that oppose themselves to our exertions, and remain immovable or incomprehensible to every successive generation of men. We are, in other words, restricted by our physical and intellectual constitution, to modes of life and exercises of our intelligence, within certain bounds imposed upon us by our Creator. He has announced to us the duties we are to perform under the influence of that peculiar organization which he has seen fit to confer upon human nature.

Thus far man may be said to be subject to necessity. We have received a certain constitution from our Creator which is excited into action by those objects which he has appointed as exciting causes, and which continue to act upon us as long as our life endures.

But at the same time that we are thus constituted, we are by the divine appointment, free agents, at *liberty* within the bounds of our organization, to take those courses of life or to adopt those opinions which are approved by our judgment, be they what they may, and which may exhibit a very great variety of character as compared among themselves. Thus, for instance, we must eat, drink, and be clothed, or we die:—but we are at liberty to appease or gratify these necessities, by a great variety of meats and drinks, and of the various articles used for raiment. There is no *necessity* which impels us to choose one more than the other, but we make our selection according to our judgment or inclination, and which we may also resist if we please, and live in abstinence from every thing grateful as long as life may last.

'The intellectual' part of our organization is precisely under the same regulations: it is susceptible of various impulses by which the individual is excited to those acts in which some peculiar gratification consists, whether it be in action or repose, or in any modification of them. The means of gratifying the intellectual principle are many and various, and the will is at liberty to adopt which ever the understanding may prefer.

But here I shall be told by the advocates of the doctrine of necessity, that the will has no such liberty whether in choosing its animal or intellectual gratification, but that we are impelled by motives to take a particular course, which is always determined by the *strongest motive* and not by any free will or choice of our own.

Now, however plausible this argument may seem, there cannot be the least difficulty in showing that it is a simple *sophism*, whose only force consists in the equivocal meaning given to the term *strongest motive*. To show this, let us ask, what is meant by the term *strongest motive*; does it imply the wisest, the most prudent, most judicious, most conscientious, or most grateful motive? It does not imply any such meaning. The *strongest motive* of the Necessitarians implies, that it is the *prevailing motive*, no matter whether it be good or bad, wise or foolish, beneficial or injurious.

Since men are undeniably influenced by *motives* to act in some manner or other, so it does not signify what motive induces the action, that motive the Necessitarians assert, is the strongest. But why strongest?—why, *because it prevails*. *Strongest motive*, then, is clearly synonymous with *prevailing motive*.

The use of the word *strongest*, then, is a begging of the question, and its force as an argument with the Necessitarians, lies in the equivocation of implying *prevailing*. As every action of man is induced by some motive or other, so some motive or other must *prevail* over other motives. This we all admit must be the case: the advocates of liberty insist the motive prevails, because we, by our own free agency, choose to take such and such a course, and we are free to act or to let it alone, according to the estimation we make of its value whether as a matter of gratification or duty.

The advocates of necessity say the motive prevails, because it is the *strongest*. Now if they will define strongest, to imply any other meaning than *prevailing*, it can be proved against them on all sides that men do not follow the strongest motive, and if they give it the

significance of *prevailing*, then their argument amounts to this that a man will follow whatever he will follow, that he will do whatever he will do, which is a conclusion that no man can deny, but which it would be absurd in the last degree to consider as justifying the doctrine of necessity.

The consciousness of our being free agents is as distinct as any other consciousness whatever; and the evidence of the fact is to be found every where in the universal history of mankind. In every age we have testimony concerning the power of conscience in all those cases where men have abused their *liberty* by doing what they know they ought not to have done. For this abuse of their *liberty* they fear the judgment of those divinities who are supposed capable of reading the human heart, and who, therefore, cannot be deceived by any of those hypocritical assertions with which men may attempt to justify their crimes before their fellow creatures, by pleading an inability to have avoided them.

I know not that I can urge the argument in favor of the liberty of human action with greater force on the mere philosophic question; but with those who admit the divine institution of Christianity, nothing can be more distinctly stated to us than this fact. The Scriptures inform us, that God requires acts of faith and practice from us; and that we may be induced to perform those acts, certain blessings or rewards are promised if we are obedient, and certain punishments are denounced against us if we be disobedient. In this exposition of reward and punishment which pervades the whole Scripture from the beginning to the end, it is evident that the Creator has constituted us free agents, and regards us as being at liberty to follow any course we please within the limitations of that constitution that he has bestowed upon our nature. Consistently with this scheme, men are called on to do what God has required of them, and they have been notified that the day is coming when they shall be judged of their acts. No other proof of our free agency can be required by the Christian than this, for the supposition of a judgment, without the doctrine of liberty or free agency, would be absurd to the last degree.

The doctrine of the Calvinists which would at first sight seem to be connected with that of necessity, will furnish no support to the philosophic doctrine, for they distinctly admit free agency in human actions. Thus in the Confession of Faith (*art. Free Will*) it is stated, "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty that it

is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil.”*

It now only remains for us to bring our proposed subject of investigation before the reader, whether as a sceptic or as a half-instructed Christian, in that unobjectionable manner that we may be able to estimate the truth or the falsity of its claim to be considered a system of divine constitution, without assuming any thing that might be termed a begging of the question.

The theory of Christianity in its great extent, and as involving all its special details, is as follows: The Creator of all things is reported to have announced to mankind, through the medium of certain individuals, that he has made the universe and all that it contains, and that he preserves and sustains all things both by a general and particular providence.

From man as an intellectual and moral being, the Creator has required certain acts whether of faith or of practice, which, as we comply with or reject, so we are taught we shall be happy or miserable in eternity.

The revelations that the Creator is reported to have made upon these subjects, having been recorded by men, constitute that volume denominated the Bible or Sacred Scriptures.

But the doctrines announced by the Scriptures, are not addressed to us on the mere question of whether we will obey or disobey these asserted revelations of the Creator, they are addressed to us as rational and intelligent beings, contemplated to undergo probation before our Creator as free agents, and as such, free to think right, free to think incorrectly, free to do right, free to do wrong. Consequently all our speculations on religious subjects, be they what they may, are neither more nor less than one part of that actual probation to which we have been subjected by the Creator.

This undeniable circumstance of our probationary condition, if

* The most capable metaphysical writer that I am acquainted with, who advocated the Calvinistic doctrine, is the pious and learned Jonathan Edwards, formerly President of Princeton College. As many persons had taken up the notion that he maintained the philosophical doctrine of necessity in his Treatise on the Will, he has vindicated himself from such an imputation, in a letter addressed to a clergyman, which is printed at the end of his Treatise on the Will. “Nothing,” says he, “that I maintain, supposes that men are at all hindered by any fatal necessity from doing and even willing and choosing as they please, with full freedom; yea with the highest degree of liberty that ever was thought of, or that ever could possibly enter into the heart of any man to conceive.”

properly considered, will enable us to correct many false views with which the subject of Christianity has been regarded, as well as to point out the rational course we should pursue that we may be able fairly to ascertain its actual truth.

Now in what manner shall we proceed to ascertain whether Christianity be of divine appointment or not?

Are we to judge of the Scriptures as an asserted revelation from God, by estimating them as compared with our ideas of his nature and attributes? Or, are we to judge of them as writings addressed to our understanding as human beings, and which are to be received or rejected by those principles of truth, according to which we measure the credibility of any human communication?

Nothing can be more different than these two modes of proceeding, and yet nothing seems less distinguished by men in their schemes of investigation; for, as it appears to me in the majority of instances they pursue the wrong course. As it is necessary that we should with the greatest possible accuracy, determine which of these two schemes we must adopt in making our proposed investigation, I shall exhibit the very different nature of the arguments we must resort to, according to either mode of proceeding.

If all knowledge of God, his providence, our future state, &c. has arisen solely from the revelation which God has seen fit to make to mankind on these subjects, and that any knowledge of him and his providence is altogether unattainable by human reason, then we can only judge of the truth of the dogmas stated in the Scriptures, by the credibility of those persons who have announced themselves his messengers as communicating to us those particular subjects of religious faith.

But if, as the deists contend, and as no small number of Christians have admitted, there is a certain light of nature that informs us of God and his attributes to a greater or less degree, then it is perfectly justifiable that the God of the Scriptures, and the dogmas of our religion, shall be judged to a greater or less degree, by that knowledge which we are asserted to derive from this clear light of nature.

It being then sufficiently evident that there are two theories of means by which the credibility of the Christian religion is to be determined, and which are directly opposite to each other, it is impossible for us to begin an examination of the truth of Christianity until

we have ascertained which is the true way, and how far it is correct in principle and capable of application.

To enable us to appreciate this subject, we must necessarily advert to the various sources from whence all human knowledge upon religious subjects may have been derived, and then carefully determine the true value of the deductions we are capable of making from such data or principles; for these principles of knowledge are evidently the tests to be used in our proposed analysis, and unless we fully understand the true value of our tests, it is impossible we can judge of the merits of the subject to which they are applied.

The sources from which men derive the arguments or objections, by which they approve or reject Christianity, are evidently the following:

The evidences of Natural Theology,

The deductions of what is termed Natural Religion,

The theory of Moral Distinctions,

The credibility or incredibility of human testimony as to the truth of facts which are asserted to have taken place.

Now before we can undertake to estimate the truth or falsehood of Christianity, it is of essential importance that we first ascertain the actual value of the principles by which we are to make our decision. In other words we must accurately determine the following particulars:

What is the actual amount of knowledge that we derive from the study of Natural Theology?

What is the actual value of those principles that constitute the Theory of Natural Religion?

What is the true theory of Moral Distinctions, *i. e.* what is it that makes one action to be right and another wrong?

What is it that constitutes a man a credible witness, and what is it that makes us mistrust and reject the testimony of another?

Now the value of these tests of the truth or falsehood of Christianity must be carefully ascertained themselves before we can at all apply them, for unless we have correct ideas of their actual value, we shall certainly make an erroneous judgment from their improper application.

To us of the present day there can be no great difficulty in coming to a conclusion on the actual merits of these tests, for they are subjects that belong to the intellectual history of mankind, and have been

for ages discussed with all the acuteness that philosophy, under every possible difference of opinion, has brought to bear upon such particulars. We therefore have little else to do than determine the truth of other men's speculations on these subjects, and thus ascertain the actual value of the principles themselves.

A distinct apprehension of the actual value of those principles or tests by which we are to judge of the truth or falsehood of Christianity, does not involve any necessity of ascertaining any other fact than the actual amount or value of the knowledge that men do possess on such subjects. Considered as a test of Christianity, it is just as important for us to ascertain that any particular subject of ethics or metaphysics is incomprehensible or capable of several different solutions, as it is to be able to demonstrate it in any one view, with all the clearness of the Q. E. D. of Euclid. For our proceeding is only based on the correct application of the actual amount of our knowledge on such subjects, and hence it is as important for us to be assured of our real ignorance or uncertainty on particular subjects, as it is to know that we understand other particulars, distinctly and clearly.

Now there can be no doubt that the most erroneous judgments have been made upon the Christian religion, whether by deist or Christian, in consequence of their inattention to this preliminary analysis of the tests they have applied to this subject, for it is evident that as there is a great difference among men concerning the actual value of the tests themselves, so the conclusions of different individuals on the subject of Christianity will differ from each other according to the different values they assign to the tests used by them, and which though similar in name, have, in other respects, little if any actual resemblance. To exhibit this subject with greater distinctness, I remark, that the controversy between the deists and the Christians on the question of the actual truth or falsehood of the Christian religion, is never restricted to the discussion of the specific question whether Christianity be of divine institution or not, but it is, from the beginning to the end, intermingled with controversies as to the real origin of religious dogmas, the actual nature of moral distinctions, and various principles of metaphysical science.

Now upon these subjects there are some three, four, or five different theories of origin, and of their absolute or relative values; consequently, great confusion and distraction must be the result of a dis-

cussion where different writers at the very time that they profess to analyse a difficult subject, carry on a hot controversy upon the different values which they consider belong to the tests or principles by which the analysis itself is conducted.

Before I commence with the proper speculations of this Essay, let me urge the reader's attention to the fact, that an investigation of the truth of Christianity, conducted as it should be with a strict regard to its merits, requires the serious and concentrated application of all his intellectual powers, and is not to be determined by hasty or superficial examination. The common observation that truth is simple and easily understood is very erroneous, for the abundant experience of all past time shows that however simple the truth may be when it is fairly ascertained, yet the steps by which we attain to that knowledge, are very often tedious and exhausting, and only accomplished by much study and perseverance. But without speaking further in general terms, let me urge the following illustration.

If a man entirely ignorant of geometry be informed, that it is an easy matter to ascertain the height of an inaccessible object by a trigonometrical calculation, he may or may not credit the speaker according to the opinion he may have of his integrity and regard for truth. But should he require that the correctness of the operation should be demonstrated to his satisfaction, what amount of time and study would be necessary to clearly impress the truth on his mind, was he indeed desirous of comprehending the rationale of the process. But if we may suppose the individual to have a prejudice against admitting the correctness of the operation, how could the demonstrator overpower the ignorance of an unwilling temper, which, instead of co-operating with the teacher's endeavor, was more solicitous to embarrass and perplex him.

In such a case the truth can be mathematically demonstrated, and any one continuing in ignorance must be so either from mental imbecility, or from downright wilfulness.

If then it requires time, patience, and application, to comprehend things which are capable of mathematical demonstration, it certainly cannot but require much more of such qualifications to enable us to conclude rightly on religious subjects. The very theory of the system representing man to be in a state of moral and intellectual trial, absolutely requires him to be continually exercised in intellectual and moral subjects as the very purpose of his being, and which only terminates with our ceasing to live.

AN IMPARTIAL EXPOSITION OF THE
EVIDENCES AND DOCTRINES
OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

CHAPTER I.

INVESTIGATION CONCERNING THE VALUE OF THE PRINCIPLES OF
NATURAL THEOLOGY.

IF the reader has hitherto considered me unnecessarily solicitous that the principles by which the merits of Christianity are to be appreciated, shall be themselves most rigidly determined before we undertake to make our proposed investigation, he will now, I apprehend, justify my solicitude on that subject, when I ask, in what manner must we commence an analysis of those first principles upon whose clearly ascertained value, the absolute importance of our future investigation depends.

Thus for our very commencement. In what manner shall we proceed to investigate the value of the deductions to be made from the study of Natural Theology, which is the only source from which our theological views are derived, independent of those principles, which have been asserted to be formal revelations from God himself.

In what manner shall we begin a disquisition on the merits of Natural Theology, which shall be so impartial in its statements, that both Christian and deist will be satisfied with the fairness of the manner in which the subject shall be introduced.

The Christian cannot admit any statement of this subject that either directly or indirectly implies that the human race have ever been ignorant of the fact of God's existence, and of our religious obligations to serve him. On the contrary, they insist that when God made our first parents he made a formal revelation of himself to them, and which has been repeated since at various times.

But the deist or sceptic cannot admit such a statement, for it would be evidently conceding the contested point. They contend that natural religion has arisen among men in consequence of their discerning the merits of natural theology, or from various secondary

causes which many writers have undertaken to exhibit to us in due order of their successive origin.

The difficulty, therefore, of putting this subject in a fair position for investigation, is very evident.

Some persons, aware of their inability to state this subject in a manner equally acceptable to both Christian and deist, have attempted to accomplish it by supposing a young man of awakened intelligence, independent of any religious theory, to be led from step to step, through all that succession of natural and moral phenomena by which he is surrounded, until he attains to a true judgment on the facts of the case. But it will be soon evident that this supposed unprejudiced young man is the author of the treatise in disguise, and consequently if he be a Christian, the whole discourse will tend to justify the theory of Christianity: if the writer be a deist, the whole drift of his argument will show, that the author and the supposed novice agree very harmoniously in making an exhibition more or less hostile to the theory of Christianity.

It therefore seems almost impossible to commence an investigation of the merits of natural theology upon any scheme that is not objectionable on the ground that the writer regards the subject under the influence of preconceived opinions which will more or less affect the true merits of the subject.

After having been much perplexed with the various expedients that may be suggested to remove the objections alluded to in the preceding paragraph, it has occurred to me that the only manner by which we can obviate such objections, will be by first discussing the value of the theory of natural religion under this unexceptionable introduction of the subject, viz. that religion has prevailed among mankind from immemorial time, and that no one shall assume in the first instance how it originated.

By such a proceeding it appears to me that all objections are removed, for there can be no difficulty in ascertaining what are the fundamental dogmas of this so called natural religion, and we then can, without any prejudice, proceed to ascertain the real value of the evidence or argument by which the dogmas of natural religion are sustained. As the only evidence to be received is that derived from natural theology, we shall, I apprehend, by such a procedure, be able to estimate, with all fairness, the value of natural theology, at the same time that we ascertain the true value of the theory of natural religion.

Our actual knowledge concerning the origin of religious dogmas, may be stated in a few words. The past history of mankind, exclusive of the bible, does not communicate to us any information, how the theory of religious obligation has originated. The most ancient records of human transactions, in every instance, exhibit mankind as then living under the influence of religious institutions, and the latest discoveries of modern enterprise, in hitherto unexplored regions of the earth, inform us of a similar religious condition of things, with every newly discovered nation. Hence it seems to be incontestable, that no nation, or people, have ever yet been discovered, who were destitute of the theory of religious obligation, and of which the following are the essential dogmas.

1st. That there are gods, creators, and governors of the world, who rule all things, with both general and particular providence.

2d. That all men are responsible beings before the gods, and accountable for their actions.

3d. That the soul of man is immortal, and that after the death of the body, it shall exist in either happiness or misery, according to the manner they may have lived in the present life.

These are the true dogmas of natural religion, as it is called, and their universal acceptance with all nations of men, seem to leave no objection as to the distinctness with which we have stated them. Instead of speculating how these dogmas originated among men, we shall alone inquire into the value of the proofs or arguments by which they are sustained. By such a procedure, the atheist, the deist, and the Christian are placed in the field of controversy, under equal advantages, and the several arguments they may advance, can be brought forward with their utmost force, and any honest and intelligent man may be enabled to decide whether the particular dogmas we have enumerated, as constituting the theory of natural religion, are capable of being demonstrated; whether they are but of doubtful value, or whether they may be only mere conjectures, destitute of any rational foundation. And according as we come to our conclusion, so we determine the true value of natural theology; for natural religion can have no other foundation.

As the primary dogma of natural religion is, that there exists a God, or gods, the creators, and providential governors of all things, our first investigation must be directed to ascertain the actual value of those arguments by which this dogma is sustained, and which for

our own convenience, we shall discuss as if it implied but a single deity.

From the earliest record that we have of a philosophical discussion of this subject, down to the present time, it appears that the great majority of wise men have inferred, that the construction of the material world, conveys distinct evidence of the fact of the existence of God. And that conclusion seems so direct, that we might, on first thoughts, wonder how some acute and intelligent men have held a contrary opinion.

There is, however, nothing unaccountable in this great difference of judgment, for, notwithstanding the powers of the human mind, man is but a being of imperfect intelligence, and in consequence, very liable to err. Prejudices, false though ingenious reasonings, and the distraction of mind that ensues from confounding principles together, which should be entirely separated, all concur to mislead us to that degree that no one need be surprised that errors and misjudgments are, to a greater or less degree, implicated with all human intellectual investigations. Upon no subject has there been a greater amount of error and misjudgment manifested than on the one we now have undertaken to scrutinize, and which we apprehend we are able from having carefully estimated the correct or incorrect proceeding of various writers, to place in such a point of view, as may enable us to attain to a correct judgment on the subject.

Before we enter upon any investigation concerning the existence of God, it is necessary that the significance of the term be distinctly stated, for from not attending to this particular, men have been thrown into great confusion of ideas, and indeed sometimes to such a degree as to vitiate their whole discourse on this subject. In writing abstractedly upon the nature of God, men very inconsiderately attach to that term, those peculiar ideas of his attributes, with which we habitually regard the Supreme Deity, according as we may be Jews, Christians, or Pagans. This is evidently wrong, for the God of nature exists the same every where, and alike to every one, and not according to one system more than another. At this stage of our investigation, we can only regard the word God, as an abstract term, expressive of a being whose existence involves no other signification than that of mind or intelligence, operating with power infinitely greater than we can conceive to belong to a human being. Such we must consider the term God to imply, otherwise we could

not discuss the question of his existence. He must be considered capable of making things such as they are exhibited to our senses, and as having power to sustain them in their actual existence, but we have no right at this stage of our investigation, to presume any thing further upon his nature or attributes.

Having made this correction, let us now proceed with our subject. That the visible universe, in all its prodigious extent, owes its creation, or at least its present constitution, to an operation of mind or intelligence, combined with vast power of acting, seems to be the only fair and reasonable deduction we can make from every possible examination of the things appreciable by our senses.

We cannot direct our attention to a single portion of the material universe, from the greatest masses, down to the smallest particles of matter, where we shall not observe distinct marks of determinate organization, and a subjection to fixed unvarying laws. In vegetable and animal existence, besides the general proof which their organization affords us, we see peculiar adaptations to ends and purposes, which we have the testimony of some thousands of years have never varied from those conditions of being, under which they are now exhibited to our senses.

We shall not make any particular exhibition of this subject, the facts themselves must be studied at large, either in the visible world, or in the writings of those who have published treatises expressly on this subject.* Not only are the facts of the case necessarily excluded from this Essay by their mere bulk, but I apprehend no proof is required, for the atheists themselves freely admit the facts as far as we can be justified to urge them as mere facts.

As far as I have been able to examine the writings of the later atheists, I do not perceive that they at all dispute the particular organization or adaptation of material things to particular purposes and uses, nor the permanence of the laws by which they are governed. On the contrary, they admit them absolutely, and attempt to explain the harmony, order, and permanence of all visible phenomena, by the theory of a necessary fitness and propriety of things in themselves inherently to such purposes. This admitted fitness and propriety in existing things, they allege, has either existed

* The best single work that I know of on this subject, is Paley's *Natural Theology*. But I restrict this commendation to the first twenty-three chapters. The remaining chapters of that book I cannot approve of for reasons which will be made apparent to the reader in the course of our discussion.

eternally, or that successive changes and modifications in time, have resulted in the establishment of things as we now see them.

Thus, Baron Holbach remarks, in his "GOOD SENSE," 29—"We are incessantly told to acknowledge and revere the hand of God in so wonderful a work as the human machine: *I readily confess that the human machine appears to me surprising*; but as man exists in nature, I am not authorized to say that his formation is above the power of nature."

Again, in page 30, he remarks, "Nature is a word used to denote the immense assemblage of beings, various matters, infinite combinations and diversified motions that we behold. All bodies organized or unorganized are necessary effects of certain causes. *Nothing in nature can happen by chance. Every thing is subject to fixed laws.*

"One atom of matter cannot meet another by chance. This meeting *is the effect of permanent laws which cause every being necessarily to act as it does, and hinder it from acting otherwise in given circumstances.*

"*It is not chance* that has placed the sun in the centre of our planetary system. *It is by its own essence*, that the substance of which it is composed must occupy that place, and thence be diffused *to vivify the beings inhabiting the planets.*

"*The universe is always in order. It cannot be in disorder.* The bodies, causes, and things which this world contains, necessarily act in the manner in which we see them act, whether we approve or disapprove of the effects.

"To be astonished that a certain order reigns in the world is to be surprised that the same causes constantly produce the same effect. *To wonder at the order of nature* is to wonder that any thing can exist: it is to be surprised at one's own existence."

The facts of the case, as far as any mere description of material phenomena can be made, being therefore admitted, it is evident there is no dispute concerning them. As both the atheist and theist admit them to be correctly described, the dispute is alone, whether we shall refer the present existing propriety and fitness of things to the energetic production of a divine intelligent being, or whether we shall refer them to a mere natural propriety and fitness of things in themselves, altogether irrespective of any operation of intelligent power.

As respects the atheistical theory of explanation, even if it be really the true one, it cannot be received by the human understanding, for we have not the capacity to conceive of an eternal existence to the things of our visible world. Neither have we an ability to conceive of activity or of motion, but from the impulse of a directing intelligence, whether as acting directly or under some determinate appointment of secondary causes.

The atheistical theory, therefore, is not only in direct opposition to all experience, but its hypothesis is not even comprehensible in its bare possibility. We do not mean to say, that we do not comprehend the significance of the words and terms which it employs, but of the possibility of an existence of things such as it attempts to describe.

The theory that ascribes the creation of all things, and the laws by which they are sustained, to the energy of an intelligent, powerful being or God, on the contrary, is not only distinctly comprehensible, but is indeed the only one that explains, in a manner, suitable to our capacities, the order, harmony, and proportion, by which all things have been made, and why they continue to endure in harmony and proportion.

Difficult as it may be for man to conceive rightly of the nature and existence of God, as Paine very correctly observes in his *Age of Reason*, "he does arrive at the belief of it from the tenfold greater difficulty of disbelieving it. It is difficult beyond description to conceive that space can have no limit, but is more difficult to conceive it to have a limit. It is difficult beyond the power of man to conceive an eternal duration of what we call time, but it is more impossible to conceive a time when there shall be no more time. In like manner of reasoning, every thing we behold carries in itself the eternal evidence that it could not make itself. Every man is an evidence to himself that he did not make himself; neither could his father make himself, nor his grandfather, nor any of his race make themselves; neither could any tree, plant or animal make themselves, and it is the conviction arising from this evidence that carries us on, as it were by necessity, to the belief of a first cause eternally existing, of a nature totally different to any material existence we know of, and by the power of which all things exist; and this first cause man calls God."*

* As this quotation from Paine is very superior in its philosophy to any other observation made in his works, I cannot doubt but he has taken it from some other writer, though I know not whom. I apprehend it is a paraphrase of a statement made by Hume.

With this great advantage in favor of the theory that assigns a divine intelligence or God as the creator and sustainer of all material things, one might ask with surprise, by what means has the atheistical theory been supported from times past to the present, when men of no small intellectual discernment yet unhesitatingly avow themselves to be atheists.

I believe the cause of this to be, that in this controversy there has been heretofore two very different principles discussed together as if they were but one, and by the confusion thus made of the two together, though entirely different, the atheist has received a seeming support to his scheme to which I apprehend he is not entitled in the least degree.

I have been led to infer this from the tenor of all the atheistical arguments I have been able to examine, and when after deliberately studying every position they occupied, I have alone found that instead of confuting the simple theory of the *existence and power* of a divine being as *the creator* of all things, they have attempted to establish themselves by their attacks upon the *moral attributes* ascribed by the theists to the *Creator*, and have with more or less ingenuity shown that the material universe was very far short of perfection, and that moral and physical evil was present in all things. They infer from this, in the first place, that God could not be good, and then because he was not discerned to be good, they held the deduction to be sound that there could be no God at all. Hence instead of founding their theory upon any analysis of material things, they derive their arguments exclusively from those moral and metaphysical objections that may be made against every scheme of theism. The undeniable fact of the harmony and propriety with which all material phenomena exist, they assume to be not inconsistent with their metaphysical and moral objections against theism. But they do not offer the least argument to justify their doctrine, by any evidence derived from the material constitution of the natural world.

That I may distinctly exhibit what are the true foundations of the atheistical theory, I shall lay before the reader a systematic enunciation of atheistical dogmas, by one of the most eminent as well as latest promulgators of such doctrines.

Baron Holbach, in his Essay entitled "Good Sense," represents the real force of atheism in the exhibition he has made of the theory of theism, or of Christianity, where he attaches to every affirmation the atheistical objection. His words are as follow:

“There is a vast empire governed by a monarch whose strange conduct is very proper to confound the minds of his subjects. He wishes to be known, loved, respected, obeyed, but never shows himself to his subjects, and every thing conspires to render uncertain the ideas formed of his character.”

“The people subjected to his power, have of the character and laws of their invisible sovereign, such ideas only as his ministers give them. They, however, confess that they have no idea of their master; that his ways are impenetrable, his views and nature totally incomprehensible, &c. They utter, concerning him, not a single word that does not immediately confute itself. They call him supremely good, yet there is no one who does not complain of his decrees. They suppose him infinitely wise, and under his administration every thing appears to contradict reason and good sense. They extol his justice, and the best of his subjects are generally the least favored. They assert he sees every thing, yet his presence avails nothing. He is, they say, the friend of order, yet throughout his dominions all is in confusion and disorder. He makes all for himself, and the events seldom answer his designs. He foresees every thing, but he cannot prevent any thing. He impatiently suffers offence, yet gives every one the power of offending him. Men admire the wisdom and perfection of his works, yet his works full of imperfection are short of duration. He is continually doing and undoing, repairing what he has made, but is never pleased with his work. In all his undertakings he proposes only his own glory, yet is never glorified. His only end is the happiness of his subjects, and his subjects for the most part, want necessaries. Those whom he seems to favor are generally least satisfied with their fate. Almost all appear in perpetual revolt against a master, whose greatness they never cease to admire, whose wisdom to extol, whose goodness to adore, whose justice to fear, and whose laws to reverence, though never obeyed.”

“*This empire,*” says Baron Holbach, “*is the WORLD, this monarch is GOD, his ministers are the PRIESTS, his subjects MAN-KIND.*”

This manner of reasoning as far as I have examined the atheistical writers is not peculiar to Baron Holbach, but it is common to all, and the preceding extract, conveys the full force and substance of all their arguments wherever I have seen them stated.

The reader, who has closely regarded the specific statements and objections of Baron Holbach, as just quoted, cannot fail to observe that it is alone through moral or metaphysical objections to the opinions of the theists, that the atheists come to the conclusion that there can be no God.

Baron Holbach does not determine any thing concerning the specific question, whether there be a Demiurgus or Fabricator to the universe, but he has arraigned him for not being wise and good, and for not governing the world by a manifest providence and exhibition of his sovereignty. And, therefore, because Baron Holbach does not discern such particulars in the visible world, he denies that there can be any God.

But our controversy with the atheists is not upon such points as are discussed by Holbach and others, as must be evident from the statement we shall now make.

In contending that the material universe in all its extent has been framed by a being exercising intelligence and power, we do not in the least degree, concern ourselves whether that being or intelligent principle possesses goodness, or whether he exercises any direct providence. It is indifferent to our argument, whether God be esteemed good or not, and if the atheist think the concession of any importance, I am willing to grant that God is not good, so far as we can discern his proceeding in the natural world. All our concern at present, is to ascertain whether *he made the world*, and whether there is not impressed upon his works such indications of design and skill, that shall enable us to come directly to this conclusion, that the world has been created by a powerful and intelligent being.

It is unnecessary for us to analyse the various constitutions under which all created things are presented to our eyes, for the atheists admit them to be such as we would state them to be, as mere facts. Their theory of the eternal fitness and propriety of things, to particular ends and purposes, declares expressly that very condition of things which we would endeavor to establish, by the exhibition of proof.

But what argument can the atheist advance, to induce us to believe that this harmony, fitness, and propriety of things, arises from some inherent power in nature, to produce such a condition, irrespective of an exertion of mind or intelligence?

The atheistical supposition is gratuitous in every respect, destitute

even of the semblance of proof, and incomprehensible in its possibility. We therefore reject it altogether, and prefer to adopt the theory that assigns the construction of all things to an operation of designing power. This theory we can comprehend, and it is consistent with our experience, however much it may be clogged with difficult considerations. Our ideas may be very incorrect on the subject, but as long as we can refer any fabrication or machinery, made by man, to human intelligence, so we can, without difficulty, refer the construction of the material universe, to the designing skill of an intelligent being, or God, whom we can easily conceive to be infinitely superior to man, both in his intelligence and power.*

We, therefore, hold it utterly absurd to receive the atheistical theory in explanation of the harmony and propriety with which all material things exist, when we have a very intelligible opinion at hand, by which we can explain every such circumstance. Nor can we see what possible objection the atheist can array against our conclusion, after we have detached the moral attributes of God, from any connection with the point in controversy. The atheist may, if he can, demonstrate that God is not good, but it will not follow, that therefore God has not made all things; for the existence of mind or intelligence, combined with power to act, certainly does not imply also the possession of goodness, or other benevolent attributes, as all human experience, our only guide on this point, sufficiently attests.

The only matter, I presume, the atheist may contest, is, that God is considered by every one to be essentially good, and that under this universal acceptance, no one can be justified in considering his attributes to be otherwise. Therefore, in conceding that God may not be good, that I, in fact, yield the argument:—in answer to this, I would observe, that I do not say that God is not good, but that we do not know, as yet, that he is good, and further, I maintain that the question of his goodness, does not, in the least degree, belong to the controversy, whether the material universe was made by an operation of mind or intelligence, or whether it arose out of the ne-

* "The wisdom that appears in any work of human contrivance, is incomparably less than that which discovers itself, in the structure and use of organized natural bodies, animal, or vegetable. A man, with his hand, can make no machine so admirable, as the hand itself. Nor can any of those notions by which we trace out human reason, approach the skill and contrivance of those wonderful motions of the heart, brain, and other vital parts, which do not depend upon the will of man."—*Bishop Berkley's Alciphron*.

cessary fitness of things, for their present states of existence; and I maintain as far as I can comprehend things, that the character of the Creator has nothing to do with an investigation, that concerns the specific fact, whether any particular thing was made by an intelligent being, or whether it made itself, or has existed from all eternity.

If skill, design, and purpose is apparently manifest in the construction of any thing, it is evident from every principle by which human reason can be guided, that such an object was made by an intelligent being, for it is impossible that we can conceive with our present faculties, that a thing can make itself, or that any thing can be exhibited consisting of a propriety of parts or functions, that has not been framed by intelligence.

But the atheist may contend, that God, by every religious scheme, and by myself, too, as an avowed Christian, is considered good, and therefore, I cannot really separate the Creator and his attributes from the bearing of their atheistical propositions, for still I must defend him from the charge, that he, being a good God, has made a world, in which moral and physical evil preponderates over any manifestation of his goodness, however great we can show it to be. That hence arises a manifest contradiction between the good Creator and his evil work, that it is impossible to reconcile with each other, and that it is, therefore, more reasonable to believe there is no God, than to believe in one who manifests more of evil than he does of good.

I believe the foregoing would be substantially the replication of the atheist, and I answer, that it is but repeating the theory of atheism, as I stated it at first, *namely*, that it produced no positive argument for its support, but only attacked the attributes of the God who is supposed to make all things, and who is universally considered good.

After what I have said already, it would be unnecessary to repeat my argument, or view, on this subject, showing the difference between the fact of a Creator to all things, and the fact of what his real attributes may be. The atheist now, if I represent his views correctly, would put the controversy upon the ground, whether it be more rational to believe in the existence of a good God making an imperfect and evil work, or to disbelieve in his existence altogether.

Now though I might fairly shelter myself under the very rational

supposition that the God who has made the universe, may be incomprehensible in his nature, and that, therefore, his attributes and purposes in making the world, may not be understood by man, a creature that he has made, yet I will not avail myself of what I could do with so much rationality, but I will fairly meet the atheistical objection concerning the imputation of physical and moral evil, being present in all the visible works of God, and show, as I trust satisfactorily, that this condition of things offers no justification, whatever, for the atheistical theory.

The atheistical objections against the theory of a divine Creator, upon the ground that moral and physical evil is present in all his works, appears to me as absurd a notion as ever entered the head of man. For let me ask in what does this moral and physical evil consist? It is the summary of all the pain, the trouble, the folly, or the immorality that is implicated in the imperfection of our intellectual and physical constitution or that of the world around us. Now, however great these things may be stated, and whatever may be the degree of imperfection in the visible world, I shall not concern myself in the least degree to reduce the estimate, for how does that amount, be it what it may, justify the atheist to conclude there can be no God? For let me ask, what condition of being is it possible for him to conceive of, that is not liable to this objection of being an evil state? There cannot be the least difficulty to show, that every state or condition of being, less than absolute perfection, is as relative to that absolute perfection, an evil condition. If we suppose an infinite series of intelligent or sentient beings regularly descending from a higher to an inferior condition, they are every one of them evil, as compared with absolute perfection, some in a less, and others in a greater degree. Therefore, if the measure of evil that is perceivable in the constitution of human nature, impeaches the existence of the Creator, so would a lesser degree, and one still less than that, until we shall find that no condition of being short of *absolute perfection* is exempt from the imputation of being evil. Consequently if any measure of evil be a reproach to the existence of the Creator, he must not create any thing unless he endows it with all the perfections of his own infinite being;—than which I apprehend no doctrine can be more preposterously absurd.

As every degree of existence short of infinite perfection is comparatively evil, it must be clear that no condition would satisfy a caviller on this subject, unless he was immortal, subject to no control

or inconvenience, and able to gratify every desire that might be suggested. But such a condition as this characterizes the Divine existence only, and it is palpably absurd for the creature to impeach the Creator because he has been made of less perfection than his maker. But if the Creator can, without impeachment of his infinite attributes, make a creature in any one degree below his own infinite perfection, he can, by the same rule, make others in any other degree of inferiority.

Interesting as this subject is, I cannot enlarge upon it further. I shall only add to the preceding exposition, that *good*, the term used by us as opposed to *evil*, is to be estimated in a like manner. Good abstractedly implies *absolute perfection*, and any degree of perfection less than that of the Deity becomes synonymous with evil, for greater good, and less evil, or less good, and greater evil, are convertible terms. Begin with the infinite and absolute perfection of the Divine being, and estimate the several constitutions of a series of intelligent creatures, as they fall in their spheres, and it will be seen that whether we term them lesser degrees of good, or greater degrees of evil, the significance of the terms is precisely the same. Any further application of this subject, and it is of great extension, I leave to the consideration of every intelligent reader.*

Then is it any impeachment of the infinite perfections of the Deity that he has made his creatures of a constitution less in degree than his own perfect nature? I apprehend no sane man can assert this, Then the evil conditions of our world does not impeach his perfect nature in the very smallest degree.

The objection sometimes made by the atheists, that there are no providential exhibitions of the power of God in the government of human affairs, seems to me as absurd as any other of their arguments. For what has this to do with the question, whether the material world was made by divine intelligence or not? Suppose that God does not govern the world by any providence, that circumstance does not affect the question whether the world was created by him in the very smallest degree.

Whether God governs the world by general or by particular providences is a question of facts that may be true or not. It may be visible or it may be indiscernable. Those who advocate or deny the

* Nothing has more perplexed the Christian world than to account for what is called the existence of moral and physical evil. I hope the preceding exposition will satisfy any one, that the perplexity of this subject is visionary. It is alone founded in the absurd doctrine of *abstract ideas*, that prolific source of human errors.

facts, are bound to satisfy us by their exhibition of proof. If the facts prove the general and particular providence of God, it is all very well; and if the facts do not justify us to believe in his providence, we then come to the conclusion, not that there is no Creator, but that the Creator does not govern the world by a visible providence. Any inference further than this would be absurd.

As the atheists cannot explain the order, harmony, and construction of the material universe by their theory, so their only argument has been derived from the imperfection of things and the existence of moral and physical evil, as it is called. To make their views upon these points of any importance, they must satisfy us that it is impossible that evil intelligences can work at all, or that God cannot make a work of less than absolute perfection.

But this it is impossible for the atheist to prove; and we are fully justified, from the examination of the material world, not only to believe in the existence of a God, the Creator of all things, but the manifestation of his skill, design, and power is so evident from every inspection of the natural world, that it is impossible for any reasonable man to avoid the conclusion when the subject is fairly stated.

I do not claim for the result of our investigation, that we have made any demonstration of the existence of God, further than that it is the most reasonable inference we can make from the inspection of material things. It seems to us that as we discern great skill and design in the construction of all things, so we cannot but ascribe their form and existence to the act of an intelligent being. For it is utterly impossible for us to conceive that material things can be arranged in harmony, order, propriety of parts to parts, and seemingly involving great skill, unless by the supposition of a directing mind or intelligent principle. To assert that such a state of things arose from chance, or that it never had a beginning, is not only rendering the subject more difficult of credibility, but positively even of comprehension.

The most we claim for our inference that there is a God, is that it simply possesses the value of a physical or mechanical principle in accounting for the origin and continued existence of the material universe. We do not consider that the fact of the existence of a Creator in any manner implies his possessing moral or excellent attributes, such as have been attributed to him by philosophers or theologians. But any discussion on this subject must be referred to the ensuing chapter.

Though I apprehend we have, with sufficient force, justified the theory that the material universe owes its existence to designing power and intelligence, I am altogether unable to discern, from the visible world, whether that intelligent power be single or is distributed among a number of divinities. We must all admit a manifest unity of design in all the constituent parts of our universe, and that the same laws and principles exist throughout, by which every particular principle or substance in working in its own particular sphere, yet works at the same time harmoniously in the compounded systematic operation. But though such a system of things is explainable upon the theory of the existence of a single supreme self-existing Deity, yet I cannot perceive how the facts of the case *prove* that such is the actual truth. I should think that it is more in consistence with the ordinary apprehension of men to suppose a polytheism, for the testimony of history is uniform on that point. Not a single nation or even philosopher of Paganism has maintained the doctrine of a single God. They have invariably supposed that though there was one Deity superior to all other deities, yet each of them exercised power and sovereignty in his particular, though subordinate sphere, and hence mankind have in their prayers and sacrifices attempted to propitiate their deities as distinct individuals. I, therefore, under this experience, consider it impossible to determine from the frame of the universe whether the works of creation have been accomplished and are now governed by a Deity single in his existence, or whether there be a greater or less number of divinities who have shared the work and the empire among themselves.

In the present chapter the further prosecution of this question is of no importance, for we have as yet only contended against the atheists for the construction, preservation, and permanence of the material universe through divine agencies, be they of many or of but one God.

But as the approved theory of the present day is, that there is but one God, as the proposition is not only more simple than any other, but fully as explanatory in every particular, we shall use the hypothesis in our future pages, so far as may concern our abstract reasoning on the nature and attributes of Deity, and therefore we shall, under an assumption, speak of God as one supreme, self-existing being, in a manner analogous with that of the algebraists, who express an unknown quantity by some arbitrary letter or device.

CHAPTER II.

A FURTHER INVESTIGATION CONCERNING THE VALUE OF THE THEORY OF NATURAL THEOLOGY.

HAVING now sufficiently exhibited the fact, that every examination of the material universe justifies the rationality of inferring the existence of a Creator God, as the maker of all things, our next proceeding must be to examine the value of those arguments, by which mankind, under the theory of Natural Religion, have considered him to be possessed of those peculiar moral attributes which involve all the importance that the theory of religion can have in the sight of man.

Though we have agreed to consider the creation of our visible world as the work of a single deity, yet the reader must not fall into the notion that such a doctrine has been proved. I have only consented to use the theory of a single God for the convenience of our argument. In our future use of the term God, we consider it to be synonymous with that *intelligent power* that has framed the universe, whether it be supposed to belong to one or to many deities:

As it is abundantly evident that all nations of men worship their deities under the belief that by such homage they shall either draw down blessings on their heads, or avert calamities; so it must be evident, even according to the grossest estimate, that they consider their deities to possess all those excellent attributes which would characterize a good man, though infinitely superior in degree to what they conceive human nature to possess.

Hence all nations call their deities *good*; which term as it can be understood to include the attributes of mercy, benevolence, justice, &c., I shall in future use it as a general term, embracing all excellence of moral attributes as commonly ascribed to God, in order to avoid the repetition of every particular excellent attribute.

The nearest approach we can make to a rational idea of the nature of God, as depicted under the theory of natural religion, will be to take those qualities which mankind would consider to characterize a good king, and apply them, increased infinitely, to any conception we may be able to form concerning the existence of the Crea-

tor of all things. Such a figure of comparison will be consistent in the view of all nations, and will be reconcileable to all those anomalies of feature ascribed by different people to their gods. The rude and barbarous have represented their deities to be partial, licentious, capricious, in connection with their excellent attributes, yet as such persons have never seen virtue exhibited by kings or rulers in greater perfection, the application of a similar character to God, is in truth the highest estimate they can form of his nature. A nation enjoying a greater degree of civilization, estimates the Divine excellency by a higher moral standard. But it is those alone who have attained to the highest degrees of civilization, that can speak with any becoming reverence of the Supreme Being. Though they consider him incomprehensible in the nature and perfection of his attributes, they must, nevertheless, speak of him by words and terms intelligible to mankind, both as respects his existence and providence.

Thus, in the manner of a good king ruling over his people in mercy, kindness, justice, compassionate to human infirmity, ready to forgive, and bountiful in his providence, do men, by a general theory, represent God to govern and direct the affairs of the universe. Whether this belief be under the form of a polytheism, or any modification of theism, we make no distinction, since the abstract theory of all is substantially the same however much they may differ among themselves as to particular propriety of view. We, therefore, regard no discrepancies of human opinions, for we are alone investigating the value of the abstract theory on this subject.

In attempting to ascertain what may be the nature and attributes of the Deity, it is evident we have but one source from which we can make any deduction or inference. As God is not discernable by any of our senses, we are compelled to examine his works, it being alone through them and their tendencies, that we can venture to inquire whether he possesses those moral attributes involved in the general term *goodness*, or whether he is to be regarded in any other light.

Though we see throughout the universe an evident purpose in the construction of all things, wisdom and power in the execution, all this informs us nothing of the *moral nature* of the Creator, for the present constitution of the material world perhaps is not inconsistent with his unknown attributes, whether he be, in our sense of the words, good, or of any conceivable modification of moral qualities.

As this subject has been intensely discussed for ages, it is impossible to adduce new facts or throw any new light upon it. We can only correct false positions, and detect false reasoning; but by so doing we may be able to discern, not the absolute truth, yet possibly as much as our powers are capable of appreciating under the intellectual light of the present day.

The greater number of writers contend that the moral exhibition and tendency of God's visible works show him to be good. His evident providence towards mankind, and all other animal natures, the happiness and comfortable existence that each may, or does actually enjoy under his wise and benevolent appointments, are by such persons considered to be undeniable proof of the goodness of the divine nature.

A much smaller number of persons infer from the exhibition of God's providence towards man and the animal creation, that he is entirely indifferent to the concerns of our world, and exercises no particular providence in ordering human affairs.

A third class, (the atheists,) contend, that there is so much pain and unhappiness in the constitution of both men and animals, that it is altogether inconsistent to believe a benevolent Deity could have made things as our universal experience demonstrates them to be.

To these theories, however, each class of advocates annex inseparably, supplementary opinions, which changes the simplicity of their first views into complicated theories that involve a great amount of intricate discussion. Thus, those whom we have placed first in order, admit of the decided existence of moral and physical evil to a greater or less extent, but which they reconcile to their belief of God's goodness by certain independent theories, such as the supposition of man being in a probationary state, that there shall be a future life, &c.

The second class, in saying God seems to be indifferent to the happiness of the creatures he has made, generally decline making any deduction, further than that the Deity is inscrutable by his works, and thence conclude, we have no justifiable ground to express any positive opinion whatever, concerning his nature or attributes, though they consider it indisputable that he must be good.

The third class, who consider that the inspection of creation exhibits so much pain, misery, and unhappiness, as to justify the opinion that God cannot be good, conclude from this, that there can be no God at all.

In our opinion, the continuance of so many different views upon this subject, arises chiefly, if not wholly, from the fact, that the several advocates of the above conclusions, do not confine themselves to a single exposition of opinion, but combine two or more different theories on the subject together, as if they were but single propositions, and then argue on one or the other, with so little consistency, that an antagonist can always find more or less faulty positions in their detailed arguments, and thus the controversy is continually maintained, by shewing the errors of others, not in establishing the truth of their own hypothesis.

I, therefore, propose to investigate this subject rigidly on its single merits, without any respect to those compensating schemes, that each attach to their respective theories. For it must be evident that we should have the facts pertaining to the prime question fairly established, before we attempt to add to it another independent theory of explanation.

I, therefore ask, does our knowledge of the actual condition of mankind, and of the animal creation, manifest that their good, their happiness, and comfort, are matters that imply an evident care and providence of the Deity; or is the contrary of this the truth. It is by this fact alone, that we can appreciate the moral attributes of God, for all other avenues to such knowledge, are closed up to us completely.

It is undeniable that in the constitution of human nature, whether regarded as simple individuals, or as members of general society, that there are various sources of pleasure and happiness, open to our attainment, whether as arising from the exercise of animal functions, from the various relations of love and friendship, or in the gratification of taste and intellect. Allowing all these to exist in that actual proportion, in which mankind do enjoy them, let us then ask, what is the real totality of our happiness, as estimated by the universal experience of mankind. For as every capacity, by which we receive gratification and pleasure, in like manner admits of disgustful and painful impressions, so it by no means follows, that our capacity to be made happy, involves the actual attainment of happiness.

Now, with respect to mankind, there can be no dispute, that human life is so much embittered by sorrow, affliction, and pain, so much by tyranny and oppression, so much by poverty and disease, that in all ages, every moral writer whatever, has exhibited human

nature as being essentially unhappy; and death, however much we dread his approach, has been ever regarded as our great deliverer from the troubles of human life. The Scriptures decidedly take the same view, and in short, none but certain advocates of natural theology, hold any other language on the question of fact.

Nor must we omit to state this further consideration; we have not only a capacity for being made happy, but we have a decided perception in what it consists, and strong desire to attain that happiness. If we then be incapable, from universal experience, of accomplishing our desires, except in the most partial and fleeting manner, we are sufficiently authorized by our whole view of human life, and its enjoyments, to assert that we cannot discern how God can be called good. As he is, by his visible works, possessed of infinite power and intelligence, so as he has not appointed a happy state and condition to human existence, it follows that we have no reason whatever, to consider him good, from any view derivable from our experience of his providence.

With respect to the brute animals, a stronger position against the theory of the divine goodness may be sustained, for except some few quadrupeds, such as the horse, ox, sheep, camel, &c. who are all obnoxious to the cruelty of both man and beast, almost all other animals of this class; most, if not all the birds; most, if not all the fish; all amphibious and crustaceous animals, and most, but not all the insects, live by destroying one another. To fit and prepare them for their respective conditions of being, the Creator of all things, has furnished some with talons and teeth, to tear each other to pieces; some are formed with poisonous fangs, by which they induce a terrible death, while others, by various contrivances, having arrested their victim, suck their blood or juices, with all the aggravations of terror, until death relieves the wretched creature from its pitiable sufferings.

Now whether we regard this actual condition of man or beast, as proceeding either directly from God, or indirectly from his permission, it amounts to one and the same thing. The Creator has not enabled nor permitted man or beast to be essentially happy, and as our creation is of and from God, so in the above defect it is impossible to discern how God can be esteemed good, either to man or beast. It does not conclusively follow, that he is not good, but that we

cannot discern the fact that he is so. It is possible there may be a compensatory scheme, existing some where in God's purposes, that may ultimately reconcile these extraordinary conditions of human and animal life, with an infinite perfection of nature and attributes, but this we certainly have no means of ascertaining from the natural world, for the intellect of man has been unsuccessfully working for ages how to establish such a doctrine.

But we have no concern with conjectures at the present, we must judge of facts as they are, with all honesty of view, and at the same time that we determine the actual condition of things, let us be careful not to infer consequences to them, which as being wholly inappreciable by us in their final results, are therefore liable to the utmost degrees of mistake and error.

We must acknowledge that the works of creation demonstrate the infinite power and intelligence of God, and therefore it is very possible that we are altogether incapable of comprehending his designs and purposes. It is consistent with our knowledge, to say that we cannot discern the goodness of God in his works; it would be presumptuous to assert that he is not good. As far as experience justifies us, let us speak honestly according to our knowledge; any thing further than this, is mere conjecture and hypothesis.

I had prepared for this page, an analysis of the arguments used by Paley, as one of the latest and best writers who have undertaken to establish the goodness of the Deity from an examination of the material world. But his arguments are undeserving a formal refutation. As I apprehend that none but a Christian would concede them any weight whatever; so I think any one can see that Paley's theory on that subject is destroyed by the Scriptures themselves, which in every passage that touches upon human enjoyments, represents them to be vanities connected with disappointment and sorrow. Hence Paley's argument upon which he asserts divine benevolence, *to wit*, that there is an excess of happiness in this life over its uneasiness and pain, is not only directly untrue according to universal experience, but it is expressly contrary to the general assertion of the sacred volume.*

*The reader who may not have Paley's Natural Theology at hand, will be able to see how desperately he was put to, to establish his notion, when he was obliged to advance the following argument, as one of his proofs.

"Pain itself, is not without its alleviations. *It may be violent and frequent, but it is seldom both violent and long continued, and its pauses and intermissions become positive pleasures.* It has the power of shedding a satisfaction over in-

Lord Bolingbroke, who had an especial object to accomplish, if he could prove the evident goodness of the Creator of all things, after repeatedly asserting that such was the evident fact, and as frequently evading, to give the proof, at last undertook to make a demonstration which is so entirely irrelevant to the purpose, and so futile, that we forbear to introduce it in our text. But least any one should suppose our proceeding in this case to be an unfair disposition of his argument, the reader will find the extract in our Appendix, by which he may judge for himself how really impossible it has been for the natural theologian, whether Christian or deist, to infer goodness to the Creator of all things, by any impartial examination of his works.

Baron Holbach, the atheist, writes more rationally in opposition to the scheme of Paley and Bolingbroke, he remarks, "Almost all books are filled with the most flattering praises of Providence, whose attentive care is highly extolled. It would seem as if man, to live happy here below, needed not his own exertions. Yet without his own labor, man could subsist hardly a day. To live, he is obliged to sweat, toil, hunt, fish, and labor without intermission. In all parts of the globe we see the savage and the civilized man in a perpetual struggle with Providence. He is necessitated to ward off the strokes directed against him by Providence, in hurricanes, tempests, frosts, hail-storms, inundations, droughts, and the various accidents which so often render useless all his labors. In a word, we see man continually occupied in guarding against the ill offices of that Providence, which is supposed to be attentive to his happiness. Men think they justify Providence by saying, that in this world there is much more good than evil, to every individual of mankind. Supposing the *good* we enjoy from Providence are to the *evil*, as

tervals of ease, which, *I believe, few enjoyments exceed.* A man resting from a fit of the stone or gout, *is, for the time*, in possession of feelings, which undisturbed health cannot impart. They may be dearly bought, but still they are to be set against the price. And indeed it depends upon the duration and urgency of the pain, whether they be dearly bought or not. *I am far from being sure that a man is not a gainer by suffering a moderate interruption of bodily ease, for a couple of hours out of the four and twenty."*

On the same page he further informs us, that "few diseases are fatal. I have before me the account of a dispensary in the neighborhood, which states six years experience as follows; admitted 6,420, *cured*, 5,476, dead 234, and this I suppose, nearly to agree with what other similar institutions exhibit," &c. &c. Now can greater mummery be introduced than this. Did not all Paley's *cured patients* die at last, in greater or less pain and sorrow, and can a theory, be considered as any ways probable, that appeals to such statements and exhibitions as proof of the amount of human happiness.

a hundred to ten, will it not still follow, that for a hundred degrees of goodness, Providence possesses ten of malignity."

But without going to the extreme, either of the natural theologian or of the atheist, I should presume that every man, of tolerable observation and experience, will at once admit, that there are such admixtures of good and evil, of pleasure and pain, joy and grief, life and death, involved in human existence, that it would seem that if a man will have a positive dogma on the subject of the nature and attributes of the Creator, he can come to no other conclusion, reasoning only from nature and experience, than that the deity was totally indifferent to human and animal happiness.

I presume there can be no difficulty in bringing this subject home to every honest man, by simply asking him, whether he would make the world with all the evil, sorrow, and distress, with which it abounds. I do not ask any one concerning what may be the actual proportions of good and evil discernable in the world, but whether any good man would admit that portion of pain and evil that undeniably exists. I apprehend there is no one that would for a moment hesitate to say he would not. But should such a one decline to answer the question, we have a strong decision on this point that unequivocally affirms our view. I allude to those laws enacted by humane legislation to punish men for cruelty to the beasts. If a man treats his horse or ox with unreasonable severity, he is punishable by municipal regulation in all Christian countries, yet God permits, or has created lions, tigers, and other carnivorous animals, who maintain and enjoy their existence only in devouring horses, oxen, and other animals, with infinitely greater suffering than man inflicts on them. It is, therefore, very evident that a humane man would not do, what God has either done or permitted to be done.

Though I might carry out these views to a much greater extent, they appear to me sufficiently exhibited for our general purpose. The existence, nay, the dominion of moral and physical evil, as it is called, in all material things, is so palpable, that only those who are determined not to be convinced, can pretend to demonstrate the benevolence of the deity in his providential government of this lower world.

Then from what sources of knowledge have men attained to the belief, that God possesses goodness of attributes, when every thing around us proclaims the equal, if not greater power, of an evil and

malignant principle. The ancient Persians alone, seem to approach towards a rationality of hypothesis in explaining the condition of the visible world, by the supposition that the government of the universe is a matter of contest between a good and an evil deity, who, from time to time, gain advantages over each other in the management of all things.

Hitherto, we have been employed in speculations upon the existence and attributes of the Creator of all things, subjects that necessarily involve the very foundation of natural religion, and nevertheless we have been unable to discern any sufficient authority to justify prevailing opinions. But as our preceding inquiry is somewhat difficult of investigation, there is room for the possibility of erroneous deduction on our part, as well as on that of others. But we are now to investigate other fundamental principles of the theory of natural religion, that are more directly cognizable by our senses, and which have an important retrospective influence upon the subject we have already discussed, and the positions we have ventured to take. Truth is so universally consistent, that if we have advanced any thing improper or untrue in our preceding pages, I apprehend the fallacy cannot pass undetected in our ensuing speculations, but if what we have already stated be true, its absolute consistency with what yet remains for us to exhibit, must be considered no small argument as to the real force and accuracy of our former conclusions.

By the universal theory of religious obligations, God is supposed to be not only the sustainer of all things in that general providence by which things endure from century to century, but he is also regarded as being present to every human being in a particular providence. Under the influence of this belief, individuals of all ages and countries address him in prayer, they cry to him in their afflictions, they humble themselves before him, they offer sacrifice and perform penitential austerities. They do all this under the assurance that God hears them, that he can relieve their affliction, and that he may be entreated to bestow blessings upon them.

Now upon what evidence, or upon what induction of wisdom, does this belief of God's providence depend, and what is the actual experience of mankind upon this subject.

As to the fact of a general providence, whereby God maintains, in permanence of form and condition, all existing phenomena, there cannot be any rational doubt. We have both history and our own

experience to establish that fact. As we have already shown how reasonable it is to believe the world was made by a God, so it is equally rational for us to consider that he sustains it, whether through that general system of laws appointed at its first creation, irrespective of any inspection of its concerns since that time, or whether he has it ever present to him, and sustains it by an unceasing direct energy of his divine power. A general providence, therefore, under one or the other of the preceding opinions, is no more than a corollary to the theory of its creation by an intelligent power, and which it is seemingly impossible to controvert. But upon what ground is the doctrine of a *particular providence* based, by which every individual brings himself by prayer into the immediate influences of the divine presence.

I am entirely ignorant of any facts that will justify the belief, much less establish the conviction that God exerts any manifest or visible providence in human affairs, he certainly does not distinguish between the good and the evil, the worshipper or despiser of his divinity, as far as we can perceive by any special marks of his favor or displeasure. Nay, very often we see the most impious of men to be the most prosperous, and we as often see the virtuous and pious, in affliction. In short, we continually see men, whom human laws would punish if they could reach them, pass through life without any mark whatever of the divine displeasure.

We may also appeal to universal experience, whether the worshippers of Deity have their prayers answered in any sensible manner whatever. We do not address this inquiry to any particular sect or scheme of religion, but to all men of every age and country, and I apprehend there can be no difference in their answer. They will all reply in the negative.

Then upon what rational principle does the belief of a particular providence depend; upon what grounds do men pray and offer sacrifice to God, when they have not the smallest proof to justify the supposition that God either hears or regards them.

From this notorious absence of any perceptible providence of God in administering human affairs, from the prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the virtuous, most persons have found themselves under the necessity of inferring that there must be a future state of existence, in which all the anomalies of providence, in the present life, shall be explained, where the good shall be rewarded, and the evil shall be punished.

But the inferring of any such doctrine is the most unjustifiable of assumptions, for where have we learned that the Creator's attributes are excellent and good so as to require such a compensatory scheme. It can never be permitted that one hypothetical doctrine is to be sustained by the enunciation of another equally hypothetical, and of all gratuitous inferences there is none, in my apprehension, more absolutely so than the doctrine of the immortality of the human soul, as any one who has ever speculated upon the subject, must be obliged to confess.*

Of all the unwarrantable assumptions pertaining to the theory of natural religion, it seems to me that the doctrine of the immortality of the human soul is the most repugnant to common sense. Thousands of millions of men have been born and died, and yet we have not a single fact to justify a belief of the separate existence of the soul from the body. On the contrary, the theory of the immortality of the soul has every fact in nature and reason opposed to it, and not a single justifiable inference in its favor. We see our fellow creatures, from a state of health and animation, sensibly decline through various stages of disease to the insensibility of death. Their bodies, then, rapidly decompose, and the whole frame disappears resolved into the various simpler elements of which we presume all material things are composed. With this display before our eyes, and with a total want of any other evidence, what can justify the notion, that an invisible principle bearing in itself the consciousness

*That I may satisfy the reader that my views upon this subject, are strictly conformable to the sentiments of the most eminent Doctors of Christianity, I shall make some extracts from the writings of Archbishop Tillotson, which both substantiate, at the same time that they also illustrate this subject in its philosophical bearing.

"I do not wonder that the greatest wits among the heathen philosophers, were so much puzzled with the following objection against the providence of God. If the wise, and just, and good gods do administer the affairs of the world, and be concerned in the good and bad actions of men, *cur bonis male, et malis bene*, how comes it to pass that good men many times are miserable, and bad men so happy in the present world," &c.—*Tillotson, 175 Sermon.*

In his 22d Sermon he there admits—"If there be no future life it would puzzle all the wit and reason of mankind to vindicate the equity and justice of the divine providence, and to rescue it out of the hands of this terrible objection."

It is, therefore, in this utter defect of God's visible providence, that this excellent prelate founds his chief argument for the immortality of the soul, as he honestly confesses in his 175th Sermon. "The sum of this argument, and which I have thus largely dilated upon, because I look upon it as one of the most strong and convincing of the soul's immortality, is this: *that the justice of God's providence cannot be sufficiently vindicated, but upon the supposal of this principle of the soul's immortality.*"

of former identity has escaped from the body, we know not how nor whither, and which, in the thousand of millions of instances that have occurred, have never afforded one authenticated exhibition of this supposed separate existence.

In short, I know not one single fact or argument in the philosophy of this world to justify a belief of the soul's immortality; and I further consider, that every circumstance connected with the subject is directly opposed to such a belief.*

From the frequent repetition by the school-boys of Cato's soliloquy, in Addison's Tragedy of that name, it is one of the commonest expressions among those who speak the English language, to quote Plato as having made a demonstration of the immortality of the soul. "It must be so; Plato, thou reasonest well," is continually repeated as if Plato had indeed reasoned well. That the reader may judge of this fact, I shall furnish him with Plato's arguments, and least he might mistrust my epitome of them, I shall extract them from the writings of another person.

"In nature all things terminate in their contraries; the state of sleep terminates in that of waking, and the reverse; so life ends in death, and death in life.

"The soul is a simple indivisible substance, and, therefore, incapable of dissolution and corruption. The objects to which it naturally adheres, are spiritual and incorruptible, therefore its nature is so.

"All our knowledge is acquired by the reminiscence of ideas contemplated in a prior state. As the soul, therefore, must have existed before this life, it is probable that it will continue to exist after it; life being the conjunction of the soul with the body, death is nothing more than their separation.

* All the more intellectual deists have been unable to discern any argument in favor of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. I apprehend two authorities on this point will be sufficient.

Lord Bolingbroke, (*Fragments, &c.* v. 373,) observes, "I do not say that to believe in a future state is to believe a vulgar error, but this I say that it cannot be demonstrated by reason, it is not, in the nature of it, capable of demonstration, and no one ever returned that irremediable way to give us an assurance of the fact. It was, therefore, originally an hypothesis, and it may, therefore, be a vulgar error," &c.

Hume, (*Essay on Immort. Soul,*) remarks, "By the mere light of reason it seems difficult to prove the immortality of the soul; the arguments for it are commonly derived, either from metaphysical topics, or moral or physical. But in reality it is the gospel, and the gospel alone that has brought life and immortality to light," &c. In the conclusion of this essay, after examining all the arguments advanced on the subject, he concludes with the following sneering observation: "Nothing could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to divine revelation; since we find no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth."

“Whatever is the principle of motion must be incapable of destruction.”

“Such,” says Enfield, (*Hist. Philos. I.* 248,) “is the substance of the arguments for the immortality of the soul contained in the celebrated Dialogue of the Phædo. It is happy for mankind that their belief of this important doctrine rests upon firmer grounds than such futile reasonings.”

Being justified, by a total want of all evidence, to reject the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, it becomes unnecessary to discuss the theory of a future state of reward and punishment, which having no independent proof of its own truth, rests alone upon the absolute demonstration of the immortality of the human spirit, which we have already shown to be destitute even of plausibility. It then only remains that we now reconsider, and defend, if necessary, the particular views we have taken upon each dogma of the general theory of Natural Religion, that we may decide upon the true value of the inferences derivable from the study of Natural Theology, and which we could only fairly determine by proceeding in the manner as proposed in page 28.

In coming to the conclusion, that we have no authority or argument derivable from the natural world, whereby we can infer that the Creator is good, I am aware that the prejudices of education will excite in many persons a greater or less degree of repugnance to the admission of any such doctrine, and that many persons will rather suppose some fallacy in my reasoning than admit the correctness of my deduction. This mistrust would be very justifiable if it would induce such individuals to study this important subject for themselves, and then make a judgment according to the merits of the case. But I apprehend there are but few that will do this; the majority of men rather than investigate a subject that shall put them to the trouble of carefully determining the value of those notions they have derived from education and prejudice, will prefer the shorter course of simply denying the intrinsic value of my arguments, and continue to believe the prevailing doctrines as being sterling opinions, approved by the authority of ages. Under such an impression I cannot consent to publish my views on this subject, without taking some further trouble to vindicate their truth.

Whether *the goodness* of the Creator can be discerned in the formation and government of natural things, is to be inquired into

as a matter of fact. Is it true? Is it not true? I have, with all honesty of purpose, and in all calmness of judgment, satisfied myself, that neither God's goodness nor providence are manifested by his works, according to any notion that we have of the meaning of the words, and so evidently correct is this opinion, that the very facts of the case have alone sustained atheism from the remotest times of history, down to the present day. The very facts themselves, have been sufficient to establish an absolute disbelief of the existence of a God in the minds of men of the highest order of intellect, in every age of the world, and to overpower the evidence of their senses, as to the system of intelligent design, skill, and purpose, that the construction of the material universe, undeniably presents to our senses. How then can an appeal to God's works, as evidence of his goodness be sustained when not only such an inference is denied to be correct, but even the very facts of the case are maintained to demonstrate the contrary doctrine.

This position, however, may be disputed by many Christians, who having been misled by those treatises, published both by pious and learned men upon the subject of Natural Theology, will insist, that the inferences made by such writers, cannot be destitute of that power of argument to the degree, at least, to which I have attempted to reduce them. I shall, therefore, succinctly exhibit the radical fallacy of all such treatises, so that there shall remain no doubt on this subject.

Those Christian writers who have undertaken to investigate the principles of Natural Theology, and to justify the reasonableness of the inferences, ordinarily deduced from such a study, invariably affect to place themselves in the condition of persons, who may be supposed entirely ignorant of the theory of Christianity. But though they do this, they cannot suspend the influence of their religious opinions, but with greater or less adroitness, and more or less unconsciously, they work up their views of the material world, into an accordance with their suppressed belief in Christianity, and thus they both delude themselves and their readers, with the notion that the subject has been brought to a fair exhibition, altogether independent of any assistance from the theory of Christianity.

Thus, for instance, the skill, design, and purpose, exhibited in the construction of the universe, are, by such writers, considered to demonstrate the existence of God, but not *abstractedly*, as a term, sig-

nifying divine power and intelligence, but such as he has been comprehended from the Scripture. Now, I admit that the appearance of skill, wisdom, and design, in the formation of the works of creation, *quadrates or harmonizes* with the doctrine, *that there is a God*, and will justify us to entertain such an opinion. But to give the argument any force, I must previously have had an idea of God. Now the question of real importance is, whether men could have discerned the existence of God, without having had previous instruction on that subject. The question is not, whether, after having received the doctrine, we can, to a greater or less degree, justify such a belief, from an examination of material things.

But the Christian advocate of the inferences to be deduced from Natural Theology, when he finds the appearance of skill, intelligence, and design, in the natural world, instead of perceiving that the facts only *quadrates* with the theory he or his instructors have derived from the Scriptures, fancies it to be a demonstration of the absolute existence of God as a *moral being*, and possessing excellent attributes, for without such perfection, they assert he could not be God. With this foundation, they proceed, by an imaginary force of induction, to establish the general and particular providence of God, man's probationary condition, and finally, a future state of reward and punishment, by which all the anomalies previously unexplained, are reconciled with the excellent attributes, not demonstrated to belong to God, but ascribed to him, because they believe he could not be God, without such infinite perfections. The only matter left to the authority of revelation, under such exhibitions, is, that it informs man positively, and certainly, on the subject, and directs us as to the service God requires of us.

Now the whole of such a process is neither more nor less than an artificial accommodation of natural philosophy, or of natural history, to the Christian religion, which, though it may indirectly confirm a Christian in his faith, never does convince the understanding of any one, who doubts or disbelieves, concerning the truth of Christianity. For the facts that demonstrate, in the writer's judgment, the existence of God as a *moral being*, are so clogged with the real or apparent difficulties of moral and physical evil, that the atheist or deist throws the whole structure into ruins, and compels the advocate of natural theology, at last to shelter himself in the authority of the Scripture, under the triumphant taunt of his antagonists, that the Christian religion is a matter of faith, and not one of reason. But the fact really has been, that the Christian religion has not been assailed, and the atheist or deist have simply demolished the theory of Natural

Religion. But I know of nothing in the apprehension of Christians generally, that will militate so much against the views I have taken, on the subject of Natural Theology, and the attributes of Deity, than the misconception of certain passages of the Scriptures, and which, as I find the error nearly universal, I beg leave to bring the passages alluded to under a particular scrutiny.

In the Psalms, it is said, "The fool in his heart has said, there is no God;" and from hence, many persons infer that the Scriptures assert, that he who disputes the existence, and consequently the attributes of God, is void of understanding. But every Hebraist knows that the word translated *fool*, means there, not a foolish or simple man, but one who is *irreligious* or *profligate*, who, not discerning any judgment of God in his providence, throws off all fear, and follows his own evil inclinations; which signification the context very clearly exhibits.

Again, it is said in the Psalms—"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work," &c. This is undoubtedly correct; the heavens exhibit the majesty and power of God, but we learn of them nothing as to his moral attributes or perfections.

But the passages to which most importance has been attached, are two, in the New Testament: one is in Acts xiv. 15, 16, 17, and the other in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans i. 19, 20.

In the Acts of the Apostles, as above quoted, it is related that Paul and Barnabas, at Lystra, miraculously healed a cripple, which so much astonished the people of that place, that they cried out the gods had come down to them in human shapes, and the priest of Jupiter brought forward oxen to perform a sacrifice to them. Paul and Barnabas, with some difficulty, prevented this act of religion on the part of the Lystrans, and observed to them, crying out:

"Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities, unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

"Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

"Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

The advocates of Natural Theology build largely on this last verse, but a very little reflection on the circumstances of the case, will be sufficient to show that the observations of Paul and Barnabas are wholly inapplicable to any such theory.

St. Paul and his associate were not preaching to atheists, or those who denied either God, or providence, but they were speaking to idolaters, who worshipped Jupiter and Mercury, and whose very priest prepared to offer religious homage and sacrifice to them. Now, every one knows these idolaters believed in the providence of Jupiter, as the supreme god, and their thanks had been always addressed to him for the blessings of rain, fruitful seasons, &c., which they considered, proceeded from his divine providence.

The object of St. Paul, therefore, was not to convince the Lystrans of the fact that there was a God, nor that he exercised a providence over them; for that fact, this people undeniably believed. The aim of the Apostle was to convert them from the worship of such *vanities*, as Jupiter and Mercury, to the worship of *the living God*, i. e. Jehovah. The actual receipt of temporal blessings, such as "rain from heaven, fruitful seasons," &c., cannot, certainly, determine the fact, whether the blessings came from Jehovah or Jupiter. The providence of a supreme god, was admitted distinctly by the Lystrans, as it was by all other Pagan nations. The object of St. Paul, undeniably, was to convince them that such blessings came from Jehovah, and not from Jupiter, whom they considered the chief deity.

The seventeenth verse, therefore, furnishes no authority whatever, in favor of Natural Theology, since the undoubted object of St. Paul was to convert idolaters, and not to convince atheists.

I presume the phrase "*left not himself without witness in that he did good*," &c., means, that Jehovah, the living God, who had made man and all other things, had continued to sustain, by his unceasing providence, those persons who had forsaken his worship and fell into idolatry. During the long time of their rebellion, he had given them rain, harvests, &c., and by these acts of his providence, St. Paul urges the fact of the *goodness* of God, who had thus mercifully regarded them during their rebellion, as an inducement to the people of Lystra, to now trust in his goodness and be converted to his worship.

However, the discourse of St. Paul, and Barnabas to the Lystrans, is so much abridged in the relation, that it is impossible to tell in what part of their address the words in controversy were used, and therefore we may not have paraphrased them correctly.

One thing, however, must be clear, that to give the passage any value, such as that assigned it by the natural theologian, it should be addressed to atheists and not to idolaters, such as the Lystrans were, for that they had priests and temples, is evident from the text.

The language of St. Paul in Romans i. 19, 20, is so little in favor of the theory of the natural theologians, that I claim it in support of those very opinions which I have heretofore advanced.

The verses are, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them.

"For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even his eternal power and Godhead*, so that they are without excuse."

These words are neither more nor less than a positive justification of Hume's argument, that we can learn nothing more of God from the natural world, than that he possesses divine power and wisdom; for to these two attributes alone, does St. Paul seemingly restrict the inferential judgment that men might make from the inspection of the creation. His argument is distinctly this, that as men can infer the infinite power and divine existence of God, from the works he has made, so men are inexcusable that could at all liken or compare so divine and powerful a being to images made in the form or likeness of corruptible man, much less to those of birds, beasts, and reptiles, such as the ancient idolaters actually worshipped.

The only possible cause of hesitation to this paraphrase, may be with those who are ignorant of the real significance of the Greek word *θεϊσμός*, translated *Godhead*. As Christians, we use the word *Godhead* to comprehend all those attributes of Deity which we have learned from the Scriptures, but the heathen attached no such meaning to the Greek word, and it is, as understood by the heathen alone, that St. Paul uses the term. The word implies *divine existence*, or an essence of being, superior to human nature, but conveys no determination whatever, as to the particular attributes that may characterise that state.

There is no way by which we of Christendom, can approximate to a reasonable estimate of the value of Natural Theology, but by an attentive examination of those treatises on religious subjects that have been written by the heathen philosophers.

But as it is impossible the general reader can undertake an examination of the various writings of the ancient sages, I am glad to have the opportunity of showing that the truth of my assertion can be verified by the mere English reader, in the easy perusal of Cicero's Treatises on the Nature of the Gods, and his Tusculan Disputations, which have recently been re-published in England, in very excellent translations, and which may be readily procured in our own country.

In the former of these works, more especially, the reader will see the real value of all the dogmas of the celebrated Greek sects, on the subject of religion, as understood by the most intellectual men of Cicero's age. Whatever had been first promulgated by Plato, by

Epicurus, or by Zeno, is there urged with all the corroborations of any value, that their most eminent disciples, during the lapse of two or three centuries, had been able to produce, in support of their respective systems. And these various speculations, sustained by the strongest arguments they could advance, are here exhibited by the hand of Cicero, himself, one of the most eminent philosophers of antiquity, in the full vigor of his genius, and under the further advantage of being an Academic, the only sect of the time that was not dogmatic in their judgments.

Let any one ponder on the views there given, as being the opinions entertained by as acute and intellectual men as the world has ever seen, and then the reader may pretty nearly determine what the intrinsic value of Natural Theology is, when unassisted by the theory of the Scriptures. And yet, notwithstanding the insufficient, often puerile, and sometimes most ridiculous arguments, there urged, it is most abundantly evident, from the very declarations of the philosophers themselves, that the theory of religion had not been deduced from any philosophic view of nature, but depended alone on the traditions of their forefathers, who from immemorial time had been in possession of its dogmas no one could tell how.*

In short, the sages of Greece or Rome, instead of discerning any one of the principles pertaining to the theory of religious obligations, were alone engaged in a severe intellectual contest with one another, on the question of fact alone, viz: is the theory of religion, are the doctrines concerning the gods, their providence, and the immortality of the soul, (which we have received from our ancestors,) true or not?

On this subject different opinions were entertained, and on the

*This admission is very distinctly made by Plato in several parts of his writings, as the following extracts will sufficiently show. In the *Timæus* he observes:

"But to speak concerning the other demons (i. e. the visible gods) and to know their generation, is a task beyond our ability to perform. It is, therefore, necessary in this case to believe in ancient men, who being the progeny of the gods, as they themselves assert, must have a clear knowledge of their parents. It is impossible, therefore, not to believe in the children of the gods, though they should speak without probable and necessary arguments, but as they declare that their narrations are about affairs to which they are naturally allied, it is proper that complying with the law, we should assent to their tradition. In this manner then, according to them, the generation of the gods is to be described:

"That Ocean and Tethys were the progeny of Heaven and Earth. That from thence Phorcys, Saturn, and Rhea, and such as subsist, together with these, were produced. That from Saturn and Rhea, Jupiter, Juno, and all such as we know, are called the brethren of these descended. And lastly, others which are reported to be the progeny of these," &c.

"It is proper indeed, says Plato, (in his seventh epistle,) always to believe in ancient and sacred discourses which announce to us that the soul is immortal, and that it has judges of its conduct, and suffers the greatest punishments when it is liberated from the body."

value of their respective judgments, issue was joined by the different philosophic sects.

As I can exhibit several distinct principles of much importance and interest by an epitome of Cicero's Treatise on the Nature of the Gods, I request the reader's attention to the opinions and doctrines there stated.

Q. Lucilius Balbus, whom Cicero exhibits as the defender of the stoical tenets, was, according to him, "a great proficient in the doctrine of the stoics, and esteemed equal to the most eminent of the Greeks in that part of knowledge." His entire discourse, which is much too long to be extracted, I have epitomized with all regard both to the order of the oration, as well as to exhibit the true force of all the arguments. He commences as follows:

"Our sect, (the stoics,) divide the whole question concerning the immortal gods into four parts. First, that there are gods; secondly, what they are; thirdly, that the universe is governed by them, and lastly, that they regard mankind in particular."

"The first point, I think, needs no proof; for what can be so plain and evident, when we behold the heavens and contemplate the celestial bodies, as the existence of some supreme, divine intelligence by which they are governed," &c.

Though Balbus says this first point needs no proof, it is the only point upon which he gives any rational proof, which is in a long detail, by showing the harmony, skill, and power, with which all material things are both constructed and continue to endure. His arguments are so far good, as showing the universe exhibits in every part, such evidences of an intelligent proceeding, that it is most unreasonable not to believe that there are gods.

Having shown that the construction of the universe justifies the theory that there are gods, Balbus proceeds to show that the gods have actually been seen and heard; which is related in the following words:

"In the war with the Latins, when A. Posthumius, the dictator, attacked Octavius Mamilius, the Tusculan at Regillus, Castor and Pollux were seen fighting in our army, on horseback; and since that time the same deities gave notice of the defeat of Perseus to P. Vatinus, grandfather of the present youth of that name, coming in the night to Rome, from his government of Reate, when two young men on white horses appeared to him, and told him Perseus was taken prisoner that day, &c. Nor do we forget when the Locrians defeated the people of Croto in a great battle on the banks of the river Sagra, that it was known the same day at the Olympic games. The voices of the fauns have been often heard, and deities have appeared in

forms so visible that he who doubts it must be hardened in stupidity or impiety."

"What do predictions and foreknowledge mean, but that future events are (actually) shown, pointed out, portended, and foretold to men. But though we should esteem fabulous what is said of Mopsus, Tiresias, Amphiaraus, Calchas, and Helenus, who would not have been delivered down to us as augurs, even in fable, if their art was despicable, are we not sufficiently apprised of the power of the gods by domestic examples.

"Will not the temerity of P. Claudius, in the first Punic war, affect us, who, when the (sacred) poultry were let out of the coop and would not feed, ordered them to be thrown into the water, and joking upon the gods, said with a sneer, let them drink since they will not eat; which piece of ridicule being followed by a victory over his fleet, cost him many tears, and brought great calamity on the Roman people. Did not his colleague, Junius, in the same war, lose his fleet in a tempest by disregarding the auspices? Claudius, therefore, was condemned by the people, and Junius killed himself. Cœlius says that P. Flaminius, from his neglect of religion, fell at Thrasimenus; a loss which the public severely felt."

Balbus next proceeds to show that our earth, as producing every thing from its substance, must have those properties in herself which she manifests in the constitution of any created being. As man, therefore, is an intelligent and rational being, so the earth that produces him must also be intelligent and rational. Having by this mode of reasoning shown the earth to be intelligent and rational, he proceeds as follows:

"The divinity of the earth being clearly perceived, we must acknowledge it likewise in the stars, which are formed from the brightest and purest part of the ether, without a mixture of any other matter, and being altogether hot and transparent, we may justly say they have life, sense, and understanding, &c. It is a natural inference to suppose the stars endued with such a degree of sense and understanding as places them in the rank of the gods, for it may be observed that they who inhabit countries of a pure, clear air, have a quicker apprehension, and a readier genius than those who live in a thick, foggy climate. It is thought, likewise, that the nature of the diet has an effect on the mind; therefore it is probable that the stars are possessed of an excellent understanding, because they are situated in the ethereal part of the universe, and are nourished by the vapors of the earth and sea which are purified by their long passage to the heavens."

Having made some other observations of similar import with the preceding, he terminates his discourse upon this point by saying that "the existence of the gods appears so plain, that I can scarcely think that man in his senses who denies it."

The next point to which the arguments of Balbus are directed, is to consider "*what the gods are?*"

"Upon this subject he observes, "Nothing is more difficult than to carry our thoughts from the directions of our eyes. This difficulty hath prevailed on the ignorant, vulgar, and indeed on some philosophers, not unlike them, who never think of the gods but in the image of the human figure, the weakness of which opinion Cotta hath so well confuted, that I need not add my thoughts upon it. But as the previous idea we have of the Deity comprehends two things; the one that he is animated, the other, that nothing in nature exceeds him: I do not see any thing more consistent with this idea, than to attribute a mind and divinity to the world the most excellent of all beings. Epicurus may be as merry with this notion as he pleases. Let him say that a voluble, round deity, is to him incomprehensible; yet he shall never dissuade me from the principle which he himself approves, for he is of the opinion there are gods, in allowing that there must be a nature somewhere most excellently perfect. It follows then, that the world has life, sense, reason, and understanding, and is consequently a deity.* But this shall soon be made more manifest by the operation of this efficient cause."

Balbus then goes into a free discourse upon the harmony, symmetry, utility, of all creation, and considers it implies a constant intelligent providence, and which he insists upon as specific proofs of the rationality and prudence of the stars, the earth, the universe, and whatever else he esteemed to be gods.

But besides these gods he recognizes sundry other objects or natures that had been deified by their ancestors in consideration of the benefits derived from them, "for they were persuaded that whatever was of great utility to human kind must proceed from divine goodness, and the name of the deity was applied to that which the deity produced; as when we call corn, Ceres, and wine, Bacchus; and that also in which there was any singular virtue," &c.; as Faith, Wisdom, Virtue, Honor, Liberty, Victory, &c.

"It has been a general custom, likewise, that men who have done

* There is some reason to suppose that by the "*world*" Balbus means in this passage, the whole *universe*, but as from his anterior views upon the stars as contradistinguished from the world, he must consider the *world* synonymous with our *earth*; it seems almost impossible to unravel the inconsistency of his discourse.

important service to the public, should be exalted to heaven by fame and consent. Thus Hercules, Castor and Pollux, Æsculapius and Liber, became gods. Thus, also, Romulus, &c. They are justly esteemed as deities, since their souls subsist and enjoy eternity, from whence they are perfect and immortal beings," &c.

Balbus then, attacks the vulgar theology of Greece and Rome, and reprobates the stories of Cælum, Saturn, Jupiter, &c.—which he calls impious fables, and attempts to shew them to have a physical origin and significance, which is not worth detailing.

On the third point of investigation, Balbus observes, "I am now to show that the world is governed by the providence of the Gods." Here, again, he shews that the world is not only framed with skill, wisdom, design, but is unceasingly sustained in its course and order of phenomena; and from this he infers the general providence of the gods in a rational manner, saying thus:

"Is he worthy to be called a man, who attributes to chance, not to an intelligent cause, the constant motion of the heavens, the regular courses of the stars, the agreeable proportion and connection of all things, conducted with so much reason, that our reason itself, is lost in the inquiry. When we see machines move artificially as a sphere, a clock, or the like, do we doubt whether they are the productions of reason? And when we behold the heavens moving with a prodigious celerity, and causing an annual succession of the different seasons of the year, which vivify and preserve all things, can we doubt that this world is directed, I will not say only by reason, but by reason excellent and divine?" &c. Balbus then goes into further proof of these particulars, which are nothing else than reiterations of the fact that the harmony, fitness, and propriety, evident in all things, shew them to be both made and sustained by infinite wisdom and power.

Upon the last point, that there is a special providence, or one that regards individuals, he infers from the peculiar organization of man, and the things that contribute directly, or indirectly, to his gratification and comfort, whether, from intellectual or physical sources of every kind. "But the strongest proof, in my opinion," says Balbus, "that the providence of the gods takes care of us, is from the art of divination. We receive many intimations from the foresight and presages of augurs and aruspices,* from oracles, prophecies, dreams, and prodigies, and it often happens that, by these

* The science of the aruspices was so eminently absurd, that Cato, the Censor, used to say he wondered how one aruspex could look at another without laughing out.

means, events have proved happy to men, and eminent dangers have been avoided."

"Besides, the gods not only provide for mankind universally, but for particular men. You may bring this universality to a less number, and that less number to particulars, &c. Thus, the gods take care of the whole world, then of its great divisions, then of particular places, such as Rome, Athens, &c., and lastly, of particular men, such as Curius, Fabricius, Cato, Scipio," &c.

"Rome and Greece have produced many illustrious men, whom we cannot believe were so, without the assistance of the Deity: which is the reason that the poets, Homer, in particular, joined their chief heroes, Ulysses, Agamemnon, Diomedes, Achilles, to certain deities, as companions in their adventures and dangers."

"Besides, the frequent appearances of the gods, as I have before mentioned, demonstrate their regard for cities and particular men. This, is also apparent, indeed, from the foreknowledge of events, which we receive, either sleeping or waking. We are, likewise, forewarned of many things, by the entrails of victims, by presages, and many other means, which have been long observed with such exactness, as to produce an art of divination."

And with these views the argument terminates.

It must be evident to the reader that notwithstanding all the evidence exhibited by Balbus, the only portion of the least value, is that amount which we have laid before him in our first chapter, viz: that there is an evident proof that the universe has been produced by an intelligent power, who sustains them by a general providence. The proofs, therefore, are alone of that value by which the theory of atheism is clogged with an insuperable objection. But they establish nothing further—they neither show whether there are one or many gods, and they fail altogether in exhibiting any particular providence. The theory of Natural Religion, therefore, consists alone of unwarrantable assumptions, and which are shaken to the very foundation, by the moral or metaphysical objections of the atheist, the Epicurean, or by the rationally cautious Academic.

Weak and unsubstantial as they are, they never imposed upon the understanding of the independent philosophers of antiquity, who have exposed the full absurdity of the system, with as much discernment as we can exercise at the present day, and had not the frauds of the priesthood, the arbitrary teaching of dogmatical philosophers, and the policy of magistrates, have interfered to prop up the fantastic theory of Natural Religion, it would have perished

with the first dawning of science and wisdom, among the philosophers of antiquity.*

Though I need not give any confutation of the theory of Natural Religion by the hand of the ancient heathen sages, yet I think it may answer a double purpose to extract the commencement of the Academic philosopher's discourse, concerning the preceding exhibition of Balbus, as it shows not only that they had truly estimated its weakness, but that the discussions of the ancient philosophers on religious subjects, were exactly the same as with us of the present day, that is to say, they were in no respect, original investigations, but simple discussions on the prejudices of their education. The theory of their religion, they had received from immemorial time, through their parents and instructors, and the philosophers were in-

* As an instance of the unreasonable intolerance of many of the ancient philosophers concerning a free discussion of theological points, I subjoin the following view of Plato, as set forth in the legislation for his imaginary republic.

"When you and I, as arguments, that there are gods, adduce the sun and moon, the stars and the earth, as GODS AND DIVINE NATURES; others, persuaded by these wise men, (ironically speaking of young men,) will say *that they are earth and stones, incapable of paying any attention to human affairs*, though they are celebrated as divinities in discourses, well calculated to procure persuasion."

To this observation of Plato's, his friend Clinias replies, "Such an assertion (what we have put in italics) would be of a dangerous nature, even if I was the only one that heard it, but now since it is heard by many, it is still more dangerous."

To this ensues a most sophistical series of assumed metaphysical principles which are intended to convince the young that there are both gods, and that they exercise providence; but least any one should remain unconverted by the arguments used by Plato, he proposes in all the spirit of the inquisition that they be made amenable to the following punishments.

"Since, therefore, the impious are thus distinguished, (i. e. by certain distinct classes,) those who become such *through folly without a vicious disposition and corrupt manners*, the judge shall confine in the prison for correction, *for not less than five years*. But during this time let no one of the citizens converse with them except those who associate for the purpose of admonishing and procuring safety to the soul. When the period arrives that they are to be liberated from their bonds, if any one among them shall appear to be more modest in his manners, let him dwell together with the modest, but if it appears that he is not, and he is again condemned for the same crime, *let him be punished with death*."

"With respect to such as in addition to their believing that there are no gods, *or that they are negligent, or easily appeased*, are of a savage disposition, despising mankind, alluring the souls of many while living, and asserting that they can allure the souls of the dead; likewise pretending that they can persuade the gods by sacrifices, prayers, and incantations; and endeavoring by these means to destroy private persons, whole families and cities for the sake of their riches—among such as these, whoever shall be condemned, *let him be fettered* in the prison which is in the middle of the region, and let no freeborn person be ever allowed to visit him, but let the food appointed for him by the guardians of the laws be brought him by servants. But when he dies, let him be hurled beyond the boundaries of the region, and left without a tomb. And if any freeborn person shall bury him, let him (the buryer) sustain the punishment of impiety by any one who is willing to inflict it."—*Plato's Laws*, b. x. vol. ii. 295 to 323.

tensely occupied in attempting to ascertain whether these dogmas were true or false.

Cotta, who, in Cicero's Treatise concerning the Nature of the Gods, represents the academics, observes, in commencing his discourse, at the beginning of the third book, as follows:

"But before I enter on the subject, I have a word to say concerning myself, for I am greatly influenced, Balbus, by your authority, and your exhortation at the conclusion of your discourse, to remember I was Cotta, and high priest, by which I presume you intimated that I should defend *the religion and ceremonies which we received from our ancestors*. Truly, I always have, and always shall, defend them, nor shall the arguments either of the learned or unlearned, ever remove the opinions I have imbibed *from them*, (i. e. his ancestors,) concerning the worship of the immortal gods. In matters of religion, I submit to the rules of the high priests, T. Coruncanius, P. Scipio, and P. Scævola, not to the sentiments of Zeno, Cleanthes, or Chrysippus, and I pay a greater regard to what C. Lælius, one of our augurs and wise men has written concerning religion, than to the most eminent of the stoics, and as the religion of the Romans at first, consisted in sacrifices and divination by birds, to which have since been added predictions, if the interpreters of the sybiline oracles, or the aruspices have foretold any event from portents and prodigies, I have ever thought these articles should not be despised. I have been even persuaded that Romulus, by instituting divination, and Numa, by establishing sacrifices, laid the foundation of Rome, which undoubtedly would never had risen to such a height of grandeur, if the gods had not been made propitious by this (our Roman) worship.

"These, Balbus, are my sentiments, both as *a priest*, and as Cotta. But you must bring me to your opinion by the force of your reason; for a philosopher should prove to me the religion he would have me embrace, *but I must believe the religion of our ancestors without any proof*."

What proof, says Balbus, do you require of me?

You have urged, says Cotta, four articles: First, that there are gods; secondly, what they are; thirdly, that the universe is governed by them; lastly, that they regard man in particular. Thus, if I remember rightly, you divided your discourse.

Exactly so, replies Balbus, but let us see what you require.

Let us examine, says Cotta, every proposition. The first, *that there are gods*, cannot be contested but by the most impious; *nay, though it can never be rooted out of my mind*, yet I believe it *on the authority of our ancestors; and not on the proofs you have brought*.

Why do you require a proof from me, says Balbus, if you believe it? Because, says Cotta, I come to this disputation as if I had never thought of the gods, or heard any thing concerning them. Take me as a disciple wholly ignorant, and answer my questions. Begin then, replies Balbus. I would first know, says Cotta, why you have been so long in proving the existence of the gods which you said was a point so very evident to all that there was no need of any proof?

Here Balbus observes that he had followed the practice of the lawyers, who use every argument they can think of. But this Cotta considered very inapplicable to a philosophical discourse, and then resumes the continuance of his observations on Balbus's previous discourse.

"It was because you did not think that the existence of the gods was so evident as you could wish, you therefore brought so many proofs. *It was sufficient for me to believe the dogma on the tradition of our ancestors;* and since you disregard authorities and appeal to reason, permit my reason to defend them against yours. The proofs on which you found the existence of the gods, tend only to render a proposition doubtful, that, in my opinion, (i. e. the prejudice of education received from *ancestors*,) is not so," &c. &c.; he then proceeds to overthrow the arguments of Balbus in long detail.

The extract I have now made from Cicero's Treatise on the Nature of the Gods, fully justify the opinions I have advanced concerning the true value of the inferences to be made from Natural Theology, and we have them fairly and honestly stated by Cotta. Here then we see an eminently learned man, who performed the function of high priest, who was interested in the ceremonies of religion as believing them to be important to the welfare of his country; and yet with all these inducements to confirm his avowed prejudice in favor of the existence and providence of the gods, he declares that the arguments brought forward by the stoics, the Natural Theologians of that day, to establish those particulars, were so far from confirming his prejudice that they had only tended to render the subject more doubtful.

The appeal made by Balbus, "*remember that you are Cotta,*" involves a consideration of some importance as determining the great value to be assigned to the judgment of that philosopher or of the sect he there represents. Cotta, as an Academic, was in nothing dogmatic; and, therefore, was at liberty to side either with the Stoics who argued for the providence of the gods, or with the Epicureans who denied that fact, according to whichever opinion was best sus-

tained by argument. There could be, therefore, no arbitrator more distinctly impartial to decide upon the dogmas of the two opposing sects. And the value of his judgment, so far as we can regard authority, is very important, in the fact of his being a heathen who lived before the promulgation of Christianity.

Hence we not only have the disinterested testimony of a priest and a philosopher as to the true value of Natural Theology, and of Natural Religion, but we have the clearest proof how deeply the traditionary doctrines of religion were established in the habits and prejudices of the ancient heathen nations. Such was their force and power that they maintained a dominion over the human mind, though deficient in all those evidences by which the subject should have been established.

But to return to the justification of those views which we have maintained throughout the present chapter. Suppose that the goodness or excellent nature of God is to be discerned by the medium of his works, of what consequence would that concession be to the advocates of Natural Religion? Will such a concession imply that we are under his moral government? Does he exercise particular providence towards us? Does he hear and regard our prayers? Without we have proof on these points, the discovery that he is possessed of abstract goodness is a mere conclusion to a curious, though entirely unimportant question; for in what manner is his goodness and providence, so exhibited to mankind, as to induce them, with any rationality of theory, to institute any scheme of religious worship and service before him? As we have no reason whatever to infer that he does regard us, so we can have none to infer that he accepts, much less that he requires from us any religious homage whatever.

It is impossible for us to infer, from any view of material things, that God maintains any moral connexion with mankind. It is true, we have established the fact of his existence and of his omnipotence. He has, it is true, constituted the seasons of the year, and given the world the light and heat of the sun, fertilizing rains, abundant harvests, &c.—these blessings are equally enjoyed by the beasts of the field, who are altogether irrational, and who, like man, participate in his every temporal comfort. If God's providence be thus exercised to the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the seas, equally, with whatever man receives, there is no distinction in God's providence between rational man and the irrational beasts. How then can we infer that man, as a rational or moral being, has any particular connexion with God, or God with him? I am unable

to see any misjudgment in the opinion that asserts there is no particular providence to be discerned in the government of human affairs.*

The strangest matter to me in studying this subject, was the objections that my Christian friends made in the first instance against my views, on the subject of particular providence, as being contrary to the Scriptures. Nothing is clearer to me than that the Scripture teaches the very same doctrine that I have maintained. The Scripture does indeed teach the doctrine of a particular providence in the most express manner; but does the Scripture teach any where that the providence of God *is discernable to our eyes?* The Scripture teaches expressly the contrary, and which I could sustain by many arguments and inferences, had I the space.† But as I apprehend this subject can be sufficiently exhibited by one statement, I shall confine myself to this single instance.

The three friends who visited Job in his affliction, from first to last, maintain the excellent essence and being of God, they exalt his majesty, justice, and providence, and find the reason for Job's calamity in the judgment of God, upon his concealed iniquity. Job strongly vindicates himself from the charge of being guilty of any particular hidden sin, though he confesses his natural weakness and infirmity. He then argues directly against their doctrine that God does govern the world by a visible providence. See Job xxi. xxiv. &c.

In the concluding chapter, where God is introduced, speaking audibly, he there openly disavows the arguments of Job's three friends, by saying, *his wrath was kindled against them*, not for having condemned Job, but *because they had not spoken of God the thing that is right, as his servant Job had spoken*. And this cause of God's displeasure is twice distinctly announced in this chapter.

If any one will compare the arguments used by Job's friends, with those that our moral writers of the present day insist upon, as proving God's particular providence, they will find them the very same in all their scope and bearing.

*Lord Bolingbroke observes, (*vol. v. 427*,) "I neither deny nor affirm particular providences. The supposition of such things has given occasion to much lying, to much flattery, to much uncharitableness, to much superstition and enthusiasm. When the votive tablets of those who had escaped drowning were showed to Diagoras, (the atheist,) at Samothrace, he asked, where were the tablets of those who had perished at sea?"

The same philosopher in an ensuing page, (439,) further says "that we have not, in philosophical speculation, in any history, except that of the Bible, (an important concession, very worthy of particular remembrance,) nor in our own experience, sufficient grounds to establish the doctrine of particular providences."

† Such as Jeremiah, xii. 1 and 2; Habakuk i. 13. These two instances are worthy of particular consideration, since both these prophets there inquire of Jehovah on this subject. The Psalms also abound with authorities on this point.

Finally, to close my argument upon the subjects of this chapter, I insist upon it as a sound deduction, that if to fabricate the natural and moral world, as it now exists, was not an act inconsistent with the perfections of a supposed infinitely good God, for he is supposed to be so by the Natural Theologians, we have no right whatever, to infer the necessity of any compensatory scheme involving a future existence.

The only reason by which a future state is avowedly inferred, is, that it is necessary for the vindication of God's infinite perfections, and justice; by the manifestation of those judgments, by which the good shall be rewarded, and the bad punished. This then, distinctly admits that God has not exercised moral dominion or providence in this life, and if this be not inconsistent with his attributes at the present time, I am utterly unable to discern any reason why it should be so at any other time. I do not deny that it may be so, but I utterly deny that we can derive from any view of natural things, either the reasonableness, much less the necessity, of such a hypothesis.

Having as I conceive, now taken a sufficient view of this subject, it appears to me that Natural Theology teaches nothing but the mere reasonableness of inferring the world has been made by intelligent power, and that Natural Religion stands upon neither reason, argument, or rationality of inference. If I am in error, it is from the insufficiency of the arguments advanced by the advocates of such theories, whether deist or Christian. Whether the subject is capable of being vindicated to the conviction of our understandings, is a matter I shall not pretend to determine, though I believe such an exhibition to be impossible in consequence of deliberating upon the objections of the atheists, by whom I confess I have been much enlightened, while studying this subject.*

But however this may be, we have now arrived at that stage of our discussion, when we are sufficiently enabled to come to a distinct conclusion concerning the value of those subjects, whose merits we have been discussing in our two previous chapters.

* Having thus shown that the theory of Natural Religion cannot explain how the dogmas of religion have originated among men, I could, if I had the space, now go on and show that they must have originated in Revelation. The analysis of Paganism, shows, that notwithstanding the seeming diversities of their different modes of worship, they are all distinctly referable to but one system, which is based upon principles that have no analogies in nature, but which we find to be identical with the annunciations of the Scripture. But as we cannot pretend to make any discourse upon this subject, we must refer to the writings of Bryant, Faber, and others, who have devoted themselves to its consideration.

According to the plan, proposed in the commencement of the first chapter, we have made a thorough scrutiny, concerning the merits of Natural Theology, and of Natural Religion, aided by a continual reference to the wisdom and intelligence of illustrious men, whether of ancient or modern times, who have written on these subjects. With all the light that has been thrown on them, we are unable to come to any other justifiable conclusion, than that, with the exception of the single fact of the existence of one or of several powerful and intelligent beings, the creators of the universe, the theory of Natural Religion, rests upon no rational foundation, whatever.

But, least we may lose sight of the principles we have discussed, and the conclusions we have made, by the use of an expression, so general, as the preceding sentence, I beg leave to state distinctly, that our investigation of the theory of Natural Theology, and of Natural Religion, completely justifies the following conclusions:

1st. That our universe and all it contains, is the production of intelligent power, but whether of one or more gods, we cannot determine.

2d. Of this god or gods, we have not the smallest idea, except that he or they possess great power and intelligence, and it may be important to add, we are altogether unable to discern their possession of excellent attributes, such as benevolence, mercy, justice, &c.

3d. We are unable to perceive that the moral affairs of human life, are superintended by any particular providence, and that universal experience opposes such a notion.

4th. That there is not only no proof, but on the contrary, it is against all fact, and the evidence of our senses, to believe that the intelligent principle in man is immortal, and consequently, we have not the smallest reason to justify the theory of future reward or punishment.

It, therefore, must be abundantly evident, that from the examination of all things appreciable by our intellect, we are unable to attain to the least knowledge, concerning the Creator of the universe. Consequently, if we are entirely ignorant of his nature, the character of his attributes, and his final purposes, it is impossible for any one to say, what is consistent, what is inconsistent with his unknown nature, or what is good, or evil, in the agencies exercised under his system of general providences.

It is, therefore, very clear that the theory or the facts of the Christian religion, cannot be investigated, nor their merits determined, by any human conceit, concerning the nature and attributes of the Deity,

for if that nature be altogether unknown, anomalous, incomprehensible, who can pretend to say, whether Christianity is consistent or inconsistent, with a nature both unknown and incomprehensible.

Having thus disposed of Natural Theology, and Natural Religion, two of those tests, commonly used towards appreciating the truth of the Christian Religion, we shall now pass on to the consideration of another subject, of equally important application, in the investigation of Scripture credibility.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE NATURE OF MORAL DISTINCTIONS, AND THE INSCRUTABILITY OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF DEITY.

As we have demonstrated with sufficient clearness, the utter impossibility of estimating the procedure of the Creator, in any respect, whatever, we might now proceed to investigate the truth of the Christian Religion, without being embarrassed with any of those unreasonable objections, that the atheists and deists have advanced against its theory, as being inconsistent with the divine perfections. As we have abundantly shown, we have no just notions, whatever, of the nature of God, so those that are commonly entertained as such, are mere suggestions of imagination and prejudice, without any foundation whatever.

But, notwithstanding all that has been done, we cannot yet proceed with our investigation, in consequence of a perverse system of metaphysical ethics, that bears so directly upon our future path, that we cannot, prudently, advance to the consideration of our subject, until we have effectually disposed of this lurking adversary. Were we now to commence a discourse upon the true merits of the Christian dispensation, we should be presently embarrassed with objections arising from the theory of the IMMUTABILITY OF MORAL DISTINCTIONS, which would bring up, under a new aspect, the past discussion concerning God's excellent moral attributes, in a more perplexed controversy, than as exhibited in the preceding pages.

The means by which an ingenious and learned deist escapes from the consequences that he foresees, inevitably follow the demolition of the theory of Natural Theology, and of Natural Religion, and renews the whole controversy, under the theory of the immutability of moral distinctions, are so very plausible, that it is impossible to preserve our present advantageous position, but by correctly appreciating the true merits of this last subject. The deist, seeing the fallacies of Natural Theology, and Natural Religion fairly exposed, will, almost immediately, shift his position, and say, I admit that the Creator of the universe is altogether incomprehensible, who denies this? But God is positively represented in the Scriptures, as having particular attributes, and as having proceeded in such and

such a manner. Now, in these statements, we have *data* given us, upon which we can reason whether the statements made in the Scriptures, are credible or not. If we cannot estimate the moral proceeding of God, as laid down in the Scripture, how can we judge of Christianity. Religion must be approved for its moral excellence, or rejected for its want of such excellence, and the advocates of Christianity, continually urge that argument on us.

I shall not stop to expose the assumptions, and the sophistry of this position, for I think the better plan will be, to investigate the theory of moral distinctions itself, and show what its true merits are, for it is a subject that has been exceedingly misunderstood, both by deist and Christian.

As our argument, hitherto, has been to show God to be wholly incomprehensible to man, so our present discourse on moral distinctions, is but a corollary to the deduction of the preceding chapters, viz: that man is so limited in his capacities, as an intellectual being, that all his knowledge is merely relative, and in nothing absolute. Hence, our knowledge being proportionate only to our particular condition of being, so we cannot appreciate any other existence or conditions of existence, beyond our own sphere.

There is a prodigious mistake among men, on this subject, for as they almost universally consider their ideas of moral distinctions, to be absolute, and not merely relative, so, under this delusion, they have presumed to judge of the proceedings of God, as implicated in the biblical writings, by what they have supposed to be immutable principles, in determining all moral action.

It is under these erroneous views of moral distinction, that the hostility of atheists and deists to the Scriptures, is chiefly brought into effective operation. For, as long as they can, in any way, direct or indirect, represent God to have acted in the scheme of Christianity, unlike to what a good man would be supposed to have done, so long will they recur to such an exposition, and very often with an unhappy influence, for the honest sceptic, unwilling to believe God to be less moral than himself, comes to the unwarrantable conclusion that the bible, that authorises certain exhibitions of Deity, must be, for that reason, a forgery by knaves and imposters.

For the most part, when men have once taken this view of the subject, whether from their own misjudgment, or from the suggestions of others, it is in vain to appeal to the points we have already established, in our previous chapters. We have there proved, that the Creator of the universe is incomprehensible, except in his attributes of infinite intelligence and power, and therefore, it is no beg-

ging of the question, to assert it is impossible for man to scrutinize the actual morality of God's proceeding. Is it not alone sufficient that we should ascertain the fact, whether the Scriptures are a revelation to us from God or not, and to decide on that subject, according to the amount of testimony that is procurable on that point. It is all in vain. I have ever found it useless to attempt to persuade the deists, or even persons merely sceptical, to examine Christianity by this rational proceeding, they will rush into a discussion of the subject upon abstract views, and decide upon its merits, by principles derived, as they assert, from the immutability of moral distinctions.

Yet, at the same time that I condemn the practice of deists and sceptics in this particular, I must add that they are not a little justified by the views largely entertained by many Christians on this subject. For nothing has been more generally maintained, and with greater dogmatism among them, than that moral distinctions are of an immutable character; and this being the case, it is very natural that the deists should alike use the theory, though with a great difference in their mode of application.

As the doctrine is, therefore, common to many Christians, as well as to many deists, it is necessary to ascertain the full merits of the system. I, therefore, shall now proceed to make an investigation to ascertain distinctly what is our knowledge of right and wrong, considered abstractedly; are moral distinctions absolutely and immutably fixed and true, or what is their real value?

Though there has been always a dispute among philosophers from a remote antiquity concerning the essence of virtue or morality, and whether moral distinctions be immutably true, or only so relatively, I shall, notwithstanding the antiquity of the controversy, mention the disputants on this question, by appellations that have an origin so late as the scholastic ages of Christendom; *to wit*, the Realists and Nominalists; for these terms imply appropriate distinctions which we are unable to find in the use of other words. Indeed it is but justice to resume the names of the ancient scholastics, as the subject of our present discourse is to be taken up pretty nearly in the condition in which it was left by them at the commencement of the reformation by Luther. The all-absorbing interest of that great moral revolution abruptly put a stop to all mere philosophic discussion, and compelled, as it were, all men of any intellectual pretensions to enlist themselves as parties in that great controversy that involved not only their civil liberties but the essential principles of the Christian faith.

Since that time, but little attention has been paid to those subjects

once so keenly discussed by the realists and nominalists, and the crowded important events of succeeding centuries, has nearly effaced from the recollection of the philosophic world, any true idea of the merits of this once famous controversy, for the prevailing opinion of the last two centuries has been that it was a strange dispute among the logicians of former times, concerning subtilities of no importance whatever. This mistaken notion of the present day is apparently justified by the meagre relations of moral and theological historians who have copied and copied from one another, without the least reference to the merits of the controversy, during the last two hundred years.

But, in truth, the dispute between the realists and nominalists concerned points which, whether as pertaining to philosophy or religion, involve almost every principle belonging to these most important subjects; and without a clear apprehension of this matter, it is almost impossible to avoid falling into error and confusion.

How the philosophers of modern times could suppose the disputes between the realists and nominalists to be a mere logomachy upon subtle trifles, would not be easy to explain, if we did not know that men too often express themselves dogmatically upon subjects which they have neither examined nor understood. And the only excuse for modern neglect of this important subject is, that if we regard this famous controversy as a mere logical dispute, under which form it is chiefly presented to our eyes, it seems wholly inadequate to account for the excitement that prevailed among the disputants. But ought not modern philosophers to have considered that a controversy in which the most intellectual men of former times were parties, and in which emperors, popes, and councils interfered, could not, from this very amount of excitement, be any thing else than a subject that involved the most important consequences.

But as I have no room to digress upon this matter, I shall, as briefly as possible, bring the doctrines of the realists and nominalists before the reader. He will then be able to appreciate those philosophic views that will necessarily arise from a discussion of the subject of moral distinctions under the conflicting theories of these ancient sects. For to them the dispute directly belongs, and without their distinctive appellations, we could not proceed but with greater labor of exposition, and the use of other designations, but which I have already stated, I know of none so good:

The ancient logico-metaphysicians did not consider the term *idea* to be as it is regarded at the present day, synonymous with *notion*, *perception*, or *apprehension*, but they believed that the ideas or no-

tions of the mind were produced by ideas, images, or phantasms that were out of the mind, and which, by some incomprehensible process were actually received into the mind, and there perfected into principles of thought.

According to Plato those ideas which constituted the types and forms of all things, were eternal and ever present to the divine mind. Emanating from this eternal source, they determined the formation of material things, and from which they flowed, as it were, constantly into the human mind.

Aristotle, the disciple of Plato, modified this doctrine in the following particular. He affirmed that the primitive ideas of Plato, had no existence independent of matter, but that they were impressed or absorbed into matter, when the Creator saw fit to organize it.

Though the reader may be unable to understand this theory, we shall make no attempt to render it more intelligible. It is alone sufficient to know, that the disciples of Plato and Aristotle, did believe that ideas had actual existence without the human mind, that they were either eternally present to the divine mind, or that they were co-existent with the organization of material forms, being inseparably united with them, and having actual or real existence in them.

The Stoic philosophers, however much they were involved in the common metaphysical errors of those ancient times, seem to have perceived the absurdity of the *real existence* which was imputed to *universal ideas*, but I am ignorant how far they proceeded in confuting the doctrine.* It is, however, unnecessary for us to investigate the subject, for in the incursions of the barbarian nations, that destroyed the civilization of the Roman empire, all science and philosophy in Europe perished. With the revival of literature in the middle ages, the writings of Aristotle again produced the ancient theory of the reality of ideas, and as the only science of the day was found in the ecclesiastical communities of the Church of Rome, their expositions of Christian doctrine largely partook of the prevailing philosophy, and the system became riveted, as it were, upon the human mind, under the sanctions of religion. But as it is impossible to speculate and explain, without, at the same time, discussing first principles, so it soon happened that men of superior intellectual perceptions, or what is more likely those who had caught a

* Socrates admirably exposed the nonentity of *universal or abstract ideas*, though I should think he was not aware of the value of his arguments. At any rate I know of no better objections than those advanced by him in the *Meno* of Plato, the *Euthydemus* of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, as well as in various other places recorded by these two writers.

glimpse of the true drift of the Scripture writings, saw the absurdity of certain of Aristotle's doctrines, and began to dispute and to deny more or less of the positions and arguments of those who followed his authority.

This dispute, however remotely it may have commenced, gradually became more serious and important, and in the early part of the eleventh century, was well known by the contest between two sects of logical metaphysicians, who assumed the peculiar appellations of Realists and Nominalists.

These names were given to the parties from the following circumstances. Those who followed Plato and Aristotle, and believed ideas and essences to be eternal and *real*, were called **REALISTS**.

The other party, though they might agree in some particulars with the Realists, utterly disputed that *universal or general* ideas, could have an actual or *real existence*. They affirmed that what the Realists called universals, were nothing but mere terms, words, or *names*. Hence, their distinctive appellation of **NOMINALISTS**, from the Latin word *nomen*, a name.

That the reader may understand this subject with greater distinctness, I must inform him that an *universal idea* is that idea which we have of many individuals or particulars, as comprehended under a single name or term. Thus *man*, as a universal, represents all mankind; *tree*, as a universal, represents all trees; *horse*, as a universal, represents all horses, and so with other things, to an almost endless enumeration.*

As long as the ancient Realists confined their discourse to *individual things*, there was nothing in the doctrine to forbid the notion that there might be an eternal exemplar of that idea, but when they spoke of *universal ideas*, it was utterly incomprehensible that there could be any single real idea of that universality. For instance, there might be the real idea of a willow tree, of an oak tree, and of every individual species of tree, but that there could be a universal idea which should, under a single form, represent all the various and different trees upon the face of the earth, was altogether incredible; and so in like manner with any other of those ideas called *universal*, by the Realists, whether material or spiritual. In consequence of the evident absurdity of the thing, the Nominalists contended there could be no universal ideas, and that those which the Realists called

*Universal ideas, are now termed *abstract ideas*, but the change of name does not alter their nature. The notions of modern metaphysicians on the subject of *abstract ideas*, is fully as absurd, and mischievous to sound philosophy, as they were when they were called universals, unless, indeed, they are recognized to be merely like algebraic expressions.

such, were nothing more than names, words, terms, without any actual existence whatever.

If the Nominalists had been permitted to develop their theory, without obstruction, I apprehend their doctrine on the subject of *universals*, would have enabled them to get rid, altogether of the theory that ideas of any kind, were other than mere *names, notions, perceptions, or conceptions* of the mind, for it must be evident, that as they had reduced universals to that state, there could be no reason why they should continue the doctrine with individuals, when they were equally explainable by the same theory. They certainly came so close to the true theory of ideas, that I apprehend they are fairly entitled to the credit of overturning the ancient doctrine, though this great improvement is especially ascribed to Des Cartes. However this may be, our present theory on the subject, is nevertheless a direct and legitimate deduction from the doctrine of the Nominalists.

I have just observed that the Nominalists were not permitted to develop their theory concerning ideas and essences. This arose from the fact that the church of Rome essentially maintained a scheme of realism, a compound of Christianity and Peripatetics; and as such the anathemas of the church were ever ready to fall upon the head of any Nominalist that ventured to discuss any subject beyond points of mere logical disputation. The Realists could ever bring the Nominalists into the utmost peril by showing that their theory directly tended to oppose the doctrines of the church, nearly on all subjects whether of ethics or theology. For it must be evident that if there were no universal ideas and eternal essences, what would become of virtue, goodness, justice, &c., which not only were universals, but also seemed to be real essences. Therefore the Realists continually charged the Nominalists with advocating impiety and irreligion, by making vice virtue, justice and injustice to be but names of things, and not matters of immutable essence. To these were added other matters, which, at that time, involved a more serious imputation; such as effecting the doctrine of the trinity, transubstantiation, supererogation of good works, &c.

The Nominalists from these causes were both limited in their arguments and exceedingly hard pressed, for at the same time that they vindicated their logical theory, they had to establish their orthodoxy as to the doctrines of the Romish church, which was, in fact, an impossible undertaking, and hence, from time to time, they passed the prescribed bounds, and incurred excommunication from the church, the horror of the superstitious, and the persecution of

kings and magistrates.* But notwithstanding all these disadvantages, the Nominalists contended manfully against the Realists, and to them is chiefly due the intellectual preparation of Christendom for the reception of the doctrines of the reformation by Luther. In this great moral event the speculations of the Nominalists were so completely merged, that the dispute between them and the Realists as a formal matter, terminated, and which has never been renewed with any interest since that time.

But though the dispute concerning "universals" is not formally discussed at present, yet it is a subject upon which men are neither neutral nor indifferent, it is of the same nature in philosophy and religion that the dispute of the Calvinists and Arminians is as to the mode of our salvation. No one can read the Scriptures with any belief of their inspiration, but who becomes either Calvinistic or Arminian, though he had never heard of such terms, and never had heard an argument on the merits of the controversy. So, in like manner, every reflecting man is either a Nominalist or a Realist, though he may be entirely unaware of what is the distinction between the two sects.

Though I cannot enlarge upon this subject at the present time, the reader will very soon see the proof of this observation in our speculation on moral distinctions. It will then be seen that this view of universal or abstract ideas is not a matter of mere metaphysical curiosity, but it will be found to have a prodigious application to every branch of speculative science. Wherever a question is to be discussed concerning the truth, the value, the duration, the extent of any subject, it is imperatively necessary that we correctly determine whether the truth is absolute or relative, whether the value is infinite or nominal, whether the duration is eternal or limited, whether the extent is boundless or circumscribed. Now where any one asserts an absolute state, he is a Realist; and where any one asserts a relative state he is a Nominalist; and a thorough understanding of this subject in its philosophical bearing upon all questions pertaining to logic, metaphysics, ethics, and theology is absolutely necessary. The doctrine of the one will inevitably lead us into superstition, error, or presumption, while the other will enable us, not wholly indeed, but in a great degree to extricate ourselves from the influences of error and prejudice, and to appreciate our true condition as beings of limited powers and capacities.

*The Nominalists never shone forth with brilliancy, but their champions fell under the censures of the Church. Witness Berenger, Roscelinus, Abelard, Occam, &c.

With this subject as involved in a general discussion of the principles of logic or metaphysics, we have no concern in the present essay. The matter of interest now before us is, to determine the true nature of moral distinctions, upon which subject it is impossible we can take sides but as Nominalists or Realists, and which terms of distinction, from reasons already assigned, I shall constantly employ in prosecuting the discussion of the ensuing pages.

In commencing our discourse on the subject of the immutability of moral distinctions, it must be premised that such a doctrine does not pertain exclusively either to those who profess Christianity, or to those who are of an opposite belief. Individuals of either opinion may hold indifferently the same views, whether for or against such a doctrine. The perplexity of this subject is, therefore, enormous by its many heterogeneous combinations, and is so deeply involved in all our speculations, that a systematic enunciation of the subject is of indispensable importance.

By the universal consent of mankind, in every age, and with very immaterial discrepancies as to particulars, certain actions are termed virtuous, right or moral, and others vicious, wrong, immoral; and so strictly defined are these various distinctions, that it is a doctrine universally received, that no possible change of circumstances in human society can make what is now called virtuous to become vicious, or *vice versa*; and thus far I admit the doctrine to be just and true.

But unfortunately for theology, this doctrine of the immutability of moral distinctions, *which alone pertains to human obligations*, has been extended to an immutability of *their nature or essence*, which carries the subject far beyond the sphere of human nature and doctrines the most pernicious, have been deduced from such an extension in every past age of the world.

Certain actions beneficial to human society, however differing in degree, are classed together as being virtuous. But from whence are they virtuous? Because they possess the common character of virtue? What then is virtue? The more general reply would be, that virtuous acts are right and vicious ones wrong. The foundation, therefore, of virtue and morality, or of vice and immorality, rests upon the theory of what constitutes right and wrong.

It would be but treading in a circle to inquire further on this subject; for we should be ultimately informed, that whatever promotes the welfare and happiness of mankind, is right and virtuous, and whatever obstructs or opposes that welfare is vicious and wrong.

But in laying such a foundation as this, for the principles of right

and wrong, it is evident that we judge of the subject as being men, and attempt to test the truth or the falsehood of a most extensive theory of principles, by the fact of their promoting or injuring the happiness of mankind. All this may be true relatively to human society, but what authority have we to extend our notions of moral distinction, out of the bounds of human nature, so that the motives or proceedings of any other intellectual being are to be determined by rules that have arisen out of the peculiarities of our particular moral condition.

Suppose there are other intelligent beings besides mankind, and with a constitution entirely different from that of ours. Will our views of moral distinction be applicable to them? I apprehend not.

The primary condition of human nature is, that we must sustain our lives by our labor, and a careful providence of things necessary to our future subsistence. Through this necessity of our constitution, arises all our ideas of peculiar property and individual rights. But such a state of things is not necessary, it is merely contingent to our present existence, for the Creator could easily have placed us in a world that required neither clothing, nor house to shelter us, and, could have sustained us by a spontaneous production of meats and drinks, in any conceivable abundance. Under such a condition of things as thus supposed, what an immense number of offences against morality would have been altogether unknown, that abound under our present constitution. All fraud, rapine, and those countless crimes that proceed from the desire to acquire temporal possessions, and the influence depending on such appendages, would be altogether incomprehensible; and in like manner, all the virtues would be unknown, that we now recognize as the contraries to the preceding immoralities.

The human race, like the majority of animals on the surface of the globe, is perpetuated by a congress of the different sexes, yet, such a condition of things is not necessary, as the exceptions to the rule, sufficiently testify. Our Creator could have made us all of one sex or kind, and impelled us to the production of beings like ourselves, by the gratification of the act, though solitary. Had this been our condition of being, what an amount of offences against morality, would have been unknown, such as incest, adultery, rape, seduction, and the various other crimes which licentious indulgences have occasioned. And in like manner, all the virtues corresponding to such vices, would have been both unknown and incomprehensible.

It is unnecessary to go into any further details on this subject, for it must be evident that under a condition of circumstances as above

suggested, man could have been placed by his Creator, to undergo probation and discipline upon any scheme of obedience to divine law, consistent with the nature God might see fit to assign him, and the result would be as complete as it may be under our present existence. And in truth, the trial of our first parents in Paradise, involved no principle of morality whatever, it was simply on a point of obedience to a law enjoined on them.

We also have this matter further exhibited to us in the theory of angelic or spiritual existences. They, as being without corporeal natures in that circumstance, annihilate every distinction of morality, so far as is implicated by our being in that peculiarity of condition.

It must, therefore, be a perfectly intelligible conclusion, that what would be moral and virtuous in beings of our constitution, would be entirely unknown and unintelligible to others of a different constitution. Morality, therefore, or our determination as to what is right or wrong in human actions, does not depend upon any eternal immutable principle of excellency in itself, as far as we can discern, but upon the peculiarities of our present constitution. It is, therefore, merely relative to that constitution, and has no other existence.

But if any one should contend that there must be, nevertheless, in every constitution of intelligent beings, different states of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, he is misled by these terms thus improperly used as *universals*. For justice and injustice, right and wrong, as applied to other beings than ourselves, have none of those peculiar characters that belong to human conceptions on such matters. In such a case, they are paralogisms that have no other significance than as expressing something suitable or unsuitable, consistent or inconsistent, proper or improper, to that condition of being. Now that there may be a propriety or impropriety, a suitability or unsuitableness, to any state of social existence, there may be no dispute, and thus far, the one may be termed right, and the other wrong. But the right and the wrong are simple relatives to that condition, and have no immutable or eternal character of distinction, for they vary with every condition of being. Unless human welfare be the universal standard by which all principles of right and wrong are to be tried, it must follow conclusively, that our notions on such principles are merely relative or *nominal*, and that it is altogether unjustifiable to assign them any *universal* or *real* existence.

But, in our previous discourse, we have alone regarded right and wrong, justice or injustice, and all other synonymous terms, as distinguishing the moral actions of individual beings, who partake of one common nature and constitution, and where all have similar de-

sires, hopes, and aversions. The principles that must determine the moral or immoral acts of such beings, among themselves, are very easy to ascertain, for every one, knowing what is agreeable or disagreeable to himself, can determine without any liability to error what is agreeable or disagreeable to others like himself, and hence under such a constitution, the universal sense of such a community, will call certain actions right and others wrong.

But the principles of right and wrong, when considered in their supposed universal significance, involve other principles than the mere regulation of the moral acts of individuals, of one common constitution. How are we to decide upon the rectitude of acts, that may occur in the intercommunication or subjection of one class of beings, to another class of beings, of a higher intellectual and moral constitution. In what manner shall we determine, how the conduct or proceeding of the one to the other, is to be regulated. Was there a race of intelligent beings, superior to mankind, placed over us, to whom we were more or less subjected, I apprehend we should immediately find a difficulty in recognizing the immutable and eternal excellence of those principles of right and wrong, that made human welfare but a subordinate matter, to the welfare and happiness of those who were superior to us, in their intellectual or moral constitution. And yet, such is the very theory by which we, who are at the head of the creation, in this lower world, have magnified our notions of morality, into eternal and immutable essences. To show the entire absurdity and inconsistency of our theories, upon right and wrong, considered in any other light than as merely regulating the conduct of one man to another man, I shall proceed with an exhibition, that effectually destroys the whole theory of the immutable and eternal essence of right and wrong, as advanced by the theory of the Realists.

According to every human system of morality, it will be found that the obligations of justice and morality, are partial requirements, that men bestow and require from men, but which they disregard by universal consent, in all our proceedings with the brute creation. We enslave the animals for our domestic uses, we plunder their stores, we slaughter them for food, without the least compunction. Nay, it is considered an innocent gratification, by the great majority of mankind, to recreate themselves with a day's sport, as it is called, in fishing, or shooting, the pleasure of which consists in depriving other animals of life, under all the aggravations of terror and pain.

Man is forbidden, by human morals, to kill man; man is forbidden, by morality, to rob man. By what principle of immutable right or morality, is man justified to kill and rob the animals.

If a man kills a horse, or an ox, he transgresses, by our moral institutions, only against the human owner, not against the animal. If a thief steals and destroys a bee-hive, there is no morality violated towards the bees, but against their human owner. And if the horse, the ox, or the bees, are at large, without a human owner, our morality permits us to captivate, or to destroy them, in all their enjoyment of life, and health, though this be done, only to procure their skins, or their horns, or perhaps for mere sport.

If there be any immutable principles of justice, or of right, or wrong, how can its notorious breach to every other animal, be justified with such a principle. I may be told that the beasts were made for the use and convenience of mankind. I will, in reply, ask the deistical Realist, by what induction of reason and justice, he can establish that assertion, and I will ask the Christian Realist, how he can justify the immutable excellency of God, for having made them for such purposes. Would it not have been more just, as well as more merciful in God, to have made man a frugivorous or herbivorous animal? But not to embarrass our present discussion, with this subject, let me return to the assertion, the deistical Realist may make, that the animals were made for the use of mankind—I ask for the semblance of proof on this subject. That the animals are very convenient and serviceable to human requirements, and that we could not be so comfortable without them, may be very true, but is that an argument, that they were made to be thus used? It is very convenient and agreeable, for a man to have *other men* to serve him and administer to his pleasures, or to his necessities, but would this justify the powerful and the strong to capture and enslave other men, that they might be used for their service. By what right, then, can any one so treat the beasts? Is it any justification to say they are without reason or understanding. Would that justify the wise and learned, to enslave any ignorant or stupid man. Will such a theory justify the angels, if they had the power to restrain and use man for the promotion of their comfort or happiness.

Our observation on the subject of the injustice with which mankind treat the animals, is not obviated by the fact of any one abstaining from the glaring cruelty of field sports, nor from the use of animal food, which some persons have attempted to urge upon moral considerations. The objection applies, with all its force, to the subjection and restraint of our domestic animals, though they may be only employed for purposes of agriculture or draught. In all such instances, however comparatively innocent they may appear, there is an unjust and violent intrusion upon the liberty and enjoyments of

the animals, and a debarring them from those gratifications, most suitable to their nature, which they continually seek through unerring instincts, and which we can only overcome, in many instances, by cruel mutilations.

It is ridiculous to urge that however this may be, that nevertheless the domestic animals actually enjoy a greater amount of comfort and happiness, through the care of man, than if they had been left in their wild state. Suppose this to be the fact, it concerns not an argument on justice, the welfare and comfort of the domestic animals is a mere contingent to our employment of them, and is neither dictated by humanity or justice. Fortunately for them, it is essential to the advantage of man, whose benevolence to his beast, is alone exercised either in fattening them for the table, or of keeping them in high working condition. As such, they are sustained for unceasing toil and servitude, only mitigated by that benevolent appointment of the God of the Scriptures, who has required all his servants to afford them the rest of the Sabbath, and which, through the influences of the Christian religion, has prevailed throughout Christendom, even over those who profess atheism and deism.

It is, therefore, impossible to justify our proceeding with the beasts, if the theory of the immutability of moral distinctions be correct. For it must be evident, we conduct ourselves by one set of principles in our transactions with mankind, and we have another set altogether different and opposite, which regulates our conduct towards the beasts.

This view, therefore, is sufficient evidence, that we have no universal system of immutable moral distinctions, nor is such a scheme discernable by our faculties any where in the moral government of God, for the fact that he has permitted and authorized men to enslave and eat the animals, though it is sufficient justification to us, thus to use them, yet that permission and its consequences, it is impossible to reconcile with any ideas we can have of the immutable moral excellence of the divine being.

This argument we have already used in a former chapter, as impugning the ascription of excellent attributes to the Creator, from any inspection of his works, and as thus totally destroying the theory of Natural Religion. I therefore need not say any thing further on the subject at present.

The reader must not suppose that I am so fantastic as to object to the employment of the beasts for our useful purposes, or for being used as food. This privilege we possess by the direct permission of the God that made them, if the Scriptures be a revelation from God.

I have been alone contending that the use of the animals, irrespective of the known permission of the Creator, is in direct opposition to every notion that men have proclaimed, concerning the immutable essence of right and wrong, and may very rationally lead us to suspect that the absolute essence of these principles depends alone upon the unfathomable will of the Creator, and is, therefore, a subject wholly incomprehensible to human nature. But however this may be, we have, I apprehend, reduced the systematic doctrine of the Realists upon this subject, from its imaginary universality into the limited scheme of mere human welfare or *philanthropy*.*

However clear our preceding argument seems to have represented this subject, I apprehend there may still exist a source of embarrassment to some persons from a perverse misapplication of the Scripture, which always speaks of God as being infinite in his perfections, and thus necessarily embodying in that perfection every moral attribute. Hence the Realist affirms that as God is the perfection of every moral excellence, therefore the very essence of right, justice, and morality, is co-existent with his immutable essence, and that, therefore, these essences or principles must have real and eternal existence.

But such an assertion as this should occasion no difficulty; for it is an absolute sophism which depends upon the fallacy of making a *universal idea* of the terms right, justice, morality, and which universality we totally deny. That Jehovah is a being of infinite and immutable excellent perfections, and who is absolutely right and just in all his proceeding, I receive as the *prime article of our religious faith*. But at the same time, I deny utterly that we can comprehend the nature of these attributes as belonging to him, or make the least comparison between them and any notion that we can have on the subject of our moral distinctions. And not only is it abhorrent to reason itself, to suppose that our imperfect notions can be put into any comparison with those of the Deity, but God himself has said, (Isaiah lv. 9,) "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

It is, therefore, absurd that the Christian Realist should require of us, that because we acknowledge God to be absolutely good, and

* In speaking of philanthropy, I mention it as a matter of speculative, not practical ethics; for it is little regarded by men any where in this last application. Thus we, in Maryland and other slaveholding states, recognize philanthropy only as applicable to men with white complexions. Negroes and mulattos are classed with horses, dogs, or oxen, and with whom they are daily bought and sold.

infinitely perfect, *as a matter of faith*, that we should, therefore, admit that their view of moral distinctions, as illustrated by the tendencies of human actions, shall be considered as being characterized by the immutability of God's divine perfection.

That God will do right, in all things, we firmly believe; but what principle is it *that constitutes the rectitude of an act of the Deity?* Certainly upon this subject we can have no opinion, for it is wholly beyond our comprehension.

God, in speaking to us through the Scriptures, asserts himself to be possessed of all perfection of attributes, and specially names justice, holiness, goodness, mercy, truth, &c. And these, as being the highest moral notions to which we can attain, are rightly addressed to our comprehension. But the use of these terms no more implies that the Deity uses the restricted human meaning of the words in an *absolute sense*, any more than his speaking of his eyes, his ears, his hands, &c., implies that he possesses a corporeal nature.

God, in addressing himself to us, does not speak of himself *absolutely*, but alone communicates to us by a language we can comprehend, for in his absolute nature he must ever be incomprehensible to a finite creature. If he has promised us any good, or if he has threatened us with any punishment, we may not doubt that he will do what he has said; for it is incredible that a being of infinite perfection will say any thing and not do it. His infinite perfection is our only, but sufficient, guarantee, at least such is the only doctrine we are authorized to take from Scripture. The revelations of God to man are confined to announcing a moral law, and with the announcement, that he will reward or punish mankind according as they obey or disregard his commandments. Concerning his nature, his attributes, his final purposes with man, or with any other of his creatures, he has not communicated to us any information whatever.

In this absolute state of ignorance, therefore, we cannot pretend, even in the smallest degree, to identify any of our notions concerning right and wrong with the unknown but perfect nature of God, and the absurdity of even supposing it practicable, can be easily exhibited. For instance, if the moral condition of man in this life, so much impeaches the perfection of the divine attributes, as to require for their vindication the compensation of another life, in what manner shall God compensate the beasts for the pains and sufferings of their life? They are irrational, cannot sin, and are, therefore, all in one moral condition. Then in a future life, if there be such, they must all be rendered, though irrational, happy, to compensate them for what they suffered in this. But, then, why were they made sub-

ject to pain and unhappiness in this world, when their condition hereafter is susceptible but of a single state of existence, to wit, a happy one, and that altogether unaffected by what they may have suffered in the present life, since they are irrational?

Now let the Realist compute, in his imagination, the innumerable myriads upon myriads of irrational animals that have ever existed; let him consider, that nearly all these animals live by destroying one another, and besides, are all liable to suffer from accident, privations, and disease. Let him consider this enormous amount of suffering connected with their existence, and then let him, if he can, justify the fact with the notion that God possesses the attributes of mercy, benevolence, or justice. If he cannot do this, how utterly absurd to insist that our notions of right and justice are eternal essences or principles that are involved in the immutability of God.

Where then is the boasted immutability of Moral Distinctions, so much extolled by the Realists? I have never been able to discern any systematic view of the subject, even in all the advantage that mere theory affords it, that did not restrict its doctrines alone to the welfare of human society, and, therefore, cannot but consider it most absurd to apply any such partial, selfish scheme to judge of the actions and purposes of God, who is, to us, so infinitely superior and incomprehensible.

All that moralists have ever written upon the subject of moral obligations, extends to no system more universal than is embraced by the word *Philanthropy*. Virtue and morality, justice, right, &c., are mere synonymes with philanthropy, and it is impossible for us to give them any other universality.

As God is God to angels and beasts as well as to man, the application of moral attributes to him must be determined by the universal scheme of all his creations. We must look at the stars of heaven in all their countless myriads, glittering throughout illimitable space, and estimate God's purposes by the laws that regulate them all, and not by mere *philanthropy*, to which our morality is exclusively restricted, and which, in its greatest amount of application, bears not a comparison to the immensity of God's creations, that an ant-hill does to our terraqueous globe.

As it, therefore, is utterly impossible for us, in this manner, to appreciate the moral proceeding or acts of Deity, our only rational course must be to treat the subject with reverence, and confine ourselves to those matters that we can comprehend. Nothing can be more preposterously absurd than that men, knowing nothing of the final purposes of his Creator, should presume to decide upon the

morality of any asserted act of God while *in transitu*, and whose proceeding may possibly require the accumulation of thousands of centuries to bring it to its proposed consummation.

As it may be possible for some malignant realist to assert, or that a hasty reader not aware of the real merits of this discussion, to fall into the mistake of considering that I hold the distinction between human vices and human virtues to be mere nominal, and not actual matters of distinction, I must distinctly express my abhorrence to any such doctrine before I leave this subject.

Man has been made by his Creator, a social being, and as such, he stands indissolubly connected with his fellow creatures in the relative positions of son, brother, father, husband, neighbor, citizen, and fellow creature. Under all these relations, he has certain duties to perform, and according as he executes them with benevolence and justice, so he is a virtuous or good son, brother, father, husband, &c.

Now the discharge of these relative duties, depends not upon any uncertain or indifferent system of principles, but upon principles whose beneficial influence upon human society cannot be misrepresented, and which the general consent of mankind have always determined to be useful, *i. e.* good and excellent, or to be hurtful, *i. e.* evil and pernicious, and that they are so, is evident, from the fact, that happiness whether to oneself or mankind, is connected with the exercise of virtue, and unhappiness, whether to oneself or mankind, is connected with vicious habits or principles. And these things, so far as they are connected with human nature, are fixed immutably, and never can be changed or confounded.

The standard of moral obligation for human duties is clear ; whatever increases the welfare of men is right, and the contrary wrong, and upon this point there can be no ambiguity.*

As to applying any such standard, to judge of the proceedings of God, we have argued against it with all our might, and contend, that it is the very height of ignorance and presumption.

Every attempt to estimate the morality of God's act, by what are called the immutability of moral distinctions, has never failed in a single instance, to end in error, folly, and mischief.

* The Christian can never be perplexed, even in the smallest degree on this subject. Our Saviour himself has given the rule (Math. vii. 12.)

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets."

Christ does not refer us to any eternal or absolute principles of right or wrong, but to the simple peculiarities of our moral and physical constitution, by which we can always, without the least difficulty, ascertain our obligations of duty.

We have now analyzed the theory of Moral Distinctions, and after a sufficient examination, have ascertained its true value, which is, that all our notions on this subject have no other value than as being involved in the peculiarities of human nature. In this connection they have indeed an immutable character and cannot be otherwise as long as human nature continues the same. Out of the sphere of human nature, they have no existence, and therefore it is most absurd that we should attempt to apply them to estimate any asserted proceeding of Deity.

We have now determined the value of three of those tests, which, in our introduction, were stated to be of essential importance in appreciating the truth or falsehood of the Scripture writings. By the principles thus ascertained, we shall be enabled to fully estimate the value of all of those metaphysical objections, that the deists have so liberally used in scrutinizing the divine operations implicated in the histories of the Old or New Testaments. But before I proceed with any application of these principles of truth, and to prevent any future cavil, I must show that we have the authority of the most intellectual of the deistical writers on our side, as affirming the truth of the very propositions which we have hitherto been at so much pains to establish.

In making the following extract from the writings of Hume, I do not simply introduce it as the opinion of an eminent philosopher, which, though it may answer a present purpose, yet, that I do not receive it myself as being correct. On the contrary, I hold the argument to be admirable, and the deduction to be irrefutable, and I acknowledge I have been greatly enabled to speculate rightly on all religious theory by a close attention to its leading principles. Therefore, in its introduction at the present page, as far as it can be said, I avouch the same to be my own view and doctrine.

Extracts from Hume's Essay on Providence and Future State, where he speaks in the character of Epicurus:

“When we infer any particular cause from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and never can be allowed to ascribe to the cause, any qualities but what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect. A body of ten ounces raised in any scale may serve as a proof that the counterbalancing weight exceeds ten ounces, but can never afford a reason that it exceeds a hundred.

“The same rule holds whether the cause assigned be brute, unconscious matter, or a rational, intelligent being. If the cause be known only by the effect, we never ought to ascribe to it any qualities be-

yond what are precisely requisite to produce the effect; nor can we, by any rules of just reasoning, return back from the cause, and infer other effects from it beyond those by which alone it is known to us. No one, merely from the sight of one of Zeuxis's pictures, could know that he was also a statuary or architect, and was an artist no less skilful in stone and marble, than in colors. The talents and taste displayed in the particular work before us, these we can safely conclude, the workman to be possessed of. The cause must be proportioned to the effect, and if we exactly and precisely proportion it, we shall never find in it any qualities that point farther or afford an inference concerning any other design or performance.

"Allowing, therefore, the gods to be the authors of the existence, or order of the universe, it follows that they possess that precise degree of power, intelligence, and benevolence, which appears in their workmanship, but nothing farther can ever be proved, except we call in the assistance of exaggeration and flattery, to supply the defects of argument and reasoning. So far as the traces of any attributes at present appear, so far may we conclude these attributes to exist. The supposition of further attributes is mere hypothesis; much more the supposition, that in distant regions of space, or periods of time, there has been or will be a more magnificent display of those attributes, and a scheme of administration more suitable to such imaginary virtues.

"You find certain phenomena in nature, you seek a cause or author. You imagine that you have found him. You afterwards become so enamored of this offspring of your brain, that you imagine it impossible but he must produce something greater and more perfect than the present scene of things which is so full of ill and disorder. You forget that this superlative intelligence and benevolence are entirely imaginary, or, at least, without any foundation in reason, and that you have no ground to ascribe to him any qualities but what you see he has actually exerted and displayed in his productions. Let your gods, therefore, O philosophers, be suited to the present appearances of nature. And presume not to alter these appearances by arbitrary suppositions, in order to suit them to the attributes which you so fondly ascribe to your deities.

"That the divinity may *possibly* be endowed with attributes which we have never seen exerted, may be governed by principles of action which we cannot discover to be satisfied:—all this will be freely allowed. But still it is mere *possibility* and hypothesis. We never can have reason to infer any attributes or any principles of action in him, but so far as we know them to have been exerted and satisfied.

"In works of *human* art and contrivance it is allowable to advance from the effect to the cause, and returning back from the cause to form new inferences concerning the effect, and examine the alterations which it has probably undergone or may still undergo. But what is the foundation of this method of reasoning? plainly this: that man is a being whom we know by experience, whose motives and designs we are acquainted with, and whose projects and inclinations have a certain connexion, and coherence according to the laws which nature has established for the government of such a creature. When, therefore, we find that any work has proceeded from the skill and industry of man, as we are otherwise acquainted with the nature of the animal, we can draw a hundred inferences concerning what may be expected from him, and these inferences will all be founded in experience and observation. But did we know man only from the single work or production which we examine, it were impossible for us to argue in this manner, because our knowledge of all the qualities which we ascribe to him, being in that case derived from the single production, it is impossible they could point to any thing further or be the foundation of any new inferences. The print of a single foot in the sand can only prove, when considered alone, that there was some figure adapted to it by which it was produced. But the print of a human foot proves, likewise, from our other experience, that there was probably another foot, which also left its impression, though effaced by time or other accidents. We comprehend in this case, a hundred other experiences and observations concerning the *usual* figure and members of that species of animal, without which, this method of argument must be considered as fallacious and sophistical.

"The case is not the same with our reasonings from the works of nature. The Deity is known to us only by his productions, and is a single being in the universe, not comprehended under any species or genus from whose experienced attributes or qualities we can, by analogy, infer any attribute or quality in him. As the universe shows wisdom and goodness, we infer wisdom and goodness. As it shows a particular degree of these perfections, we infer a particular degree of them precisely adapted to the effect which we examine. But farther attributes or farther degrees of the same attributes we can never be authorized to infer or suppose by any rules of just reasoning.

"The great source of our mistake in this subject, and of the unbounded license of conjecture which we indulge, is, that we tacitly consider ourselves as in the place of the Supreme Being, and con-

clude that he will, on every occasion, observe the same conduct which we ourselves, in his situation, would have embraced as reasonable and eligible. But besides that the ordinary course of nature may convince us that almost every thing is regulated by principles and maxims very different from ours; besides this, I say, it must evidently appear contrary to all rules of analogy to reason from the intentions and projects of man, to those of a being so different, and so much superior. In human nature there is a certain experienced coherence of designs and inclinations; so that, when from any fact we have discovered one intention of any man, it may often be reasonable from experience, to infer another, and draw a long chain of conclusions concerning his past or future conduct. But this method of reasoning can never have place with regard to a being so remote, and incomprehensible, who bears much less analogy to any other being in the universe than the sun to a waxen taper, and who discovers himself only by some faint traces or outlines, beyond which we have no authority to ascribe to him any attribute or perfection."

Though I care not about multiplying authorities, yet I think it not amiss to introduce the following brief justification of our argument, also, from a distinguished deistical writer:

"We are made able to arrive, by a proper exercise of our mental faculties, from a knowledge of God's works to a knowledge of his existence, and of that infinite power and wisdom (intelligence) which are demonstrated to us in them. Our knowledge concerning God goes no further. We are in absolute ignorance of the real essence and inward constitution of every sensible object. How much less reason is there to expect any knowledge of the manner of being, and of the nature and essence of the invisible God, or of his physical and moral attributes, beyond what his works, the effects of his nature and attributes, communicate to us. This degree, this sufficient degree of knowledge, concerning God, is a fixed point, on one side of which lies atheism, and metaphysical and theological blasphemy too often on the other."—Lord Bolingbroke, iv. 87, 88.

It would be useless to introduce the authority of any other reasoners upon this subject, for the extreme clearness with which Hume has limited the inductions of our reason upon the nature and attributes of God, seem to render any further exposition entirely superfluous. Nor can I comprehend how any reasonable man can disagree with Hume on this particular subject, nor how he can object to the conclusion, that the only attributes that we can admit the Deity to possess, distinguished from whatever he may have revealed of himself by oral communication, are those that we perceive ourselves, *to wit*: INFINITE INTELLIGENCE AND POWER.

And if this be all that we can learn of God by an examination of his works, neither Natural Theology or Natural Religion can supply us with the least argument whatever, by which we can judge of the truth or falsehood of the Christian Religion.

This being undeniably the case, we can but wonder in astonishment at Hume and Bolingbroke, who, after having exhibited the absolute nothingness of the inferences of Natural Theology, have nevertheless condemned Christianity by principles alone derived from the assumptions of Natural Theology, or by an appeal to systems of morality, built alone upon the limited basis of human expediencies.

Am I in any error on this subject? Where has Hume or Lord Bolingbroke judged of Christianity according to its own theory of evidence. All of Hume's Essays, with the exception of the one on Miracles, instead of being any argument against Christianity, are alone against the Theory of Natural Theology or of Natural Religion, and have no other application. But what has Christianity to do with any theory of Natural Theology or Natural Religion? Do the Scriptures say that our religion arose, or is to be substantiated by any examination of natural things? Does the Bible ever teach us to infer the nature of God and his attributes from an inspection of nature? Not in a single passage of the Scriptures is such a view advanced.

But most distinctly is it stated in the Scriptures, from first to last, that God spoke to man; God manifested divine presence to man; and God revealed expressly to man what man should believe, and what he should do. Then to judge of the truth or falsehood of the religious system advocated in the Scriptures, by the nonentity of Natural Theology, is supremely absurd. The doctrines of the Scriptures are stated to have been communicated directly from God or angel to man, and we of the present day, have received them through the agency and instrumentality of men. The ground of our belief then in truth of the Scriptures, rests alone upon the veracity of the individuals who have written and handed them down to our times. The only means, therefore, by which we can ascertain whether the Christian Religion be of divine appointment or not, is, by ascertaining the credibility of the biblical writers; and this must be ascertained by the application of those means or principles by which we ascertain the credibility of other men, when it is important to determine how far their testimony can be received.

Now did Hume or Lord Bolingbroke examine the Scripture upon the plan I have suggested? indeed I might ask, who has hitherto rigidly done so? The deists have omitted this from various consid-

erations, the chief of which, is, that they never have studied the biblical writings. The Christian writers, deceived by their notions of Natural Theology, have wandered away from the real merits of the case, and would have been alarmed perhaps, to have even heard it suggested, that the entire truth or falsehood of Christianity depended alone upon human testimony; yet, such is certainly the fact; we have no other authority for our belief, than the credibility which we concede to the biblical writers.

But as I am more solicitous at the present moment to show the mistakes of the deists than of Christians, let me exhibit the proof of their enormous errors under that system of assumed principles whose utter want of all rational foundation, we have been at so much pains to exhibit in our preceding expositions.

Lord Bolingbroke, as the conclusion of his research upon the authority of Christianity, observes: (*Lord Bolingbroke's Works*, v. 600.)

"The God of Moses is partial, unjust, and cruel, delights in blood, commands assassinations, massacres, and even exterminations of people, &c. The God of St. Paul elects some of his creatures to salvation, and predestinates others to damnation, even in the wombs of their mothers, &c.* If there was not a being infinitely more perfect than these, there would be no God at all, nor any true religion in the world. But there is most assuredly such a being, and he who proposes any system of religion wherein this all-perfect Being is not to be found, may say that he is no atheist, but cannot say with truth that he is a theist."

We have selected this passage as being the sum of the objections that not only Lord Bolingbroke, but which all other deists allege as conclusive against the divine authority of the Scriptures. Our reply to him, therefore, is equivalent to a reply to the whole class.

Lord Bolingbroke has not offered a single argument to impeach the veracity or credibility of the writers of the Scripture, but has made his conclusion, and passed his judgment upon the character of God, as exhibited in the Scripture, upon views derived from abstract notions, formed without any authority, concerning the divine attributes, a proceeding which he, above all other writers that I have met with, has considered to be "impious, blasphemous, and insane."

It might be sufficient alone to refer, for proof of this most outrageous inconsistency to his view of God's attributes, already extracted on page 96. But it may answer a good purpose to exhibit

* By the way, the doctrine of election, to which Lord Bolingbroke alludes, is not a doctrine of the Scripture, though it is of certain theologians. I apprehend a majority of Christians hold an opinion directly contrary.

the perversion of all reason and argument which such writers have indulged in, against the Scripture in a more palpable manner. We, therefore, shall make some further extracts from his writings.

“To talk positively of the divine attributes and nature, and to determine on our supposed knowledge of them any thing more than we are able to collect from his works, and the proceedings of his (general) providence, is very great presumption, though the common practice of (Christian) divines.”—Lord Bolingbroke’s Works, v. 41.

“It would pass for downright madness if we were not accustomed to it, and if the practice of great and good men did not authorise it in common opinion, to hear a creature, (i. e. man,) placed in the lowest form of intelligent beings, undertake to penetrate the designs, to fathom the depths, and to unveil the mysteries of infinite wisdom, which the most exalted of created intelligences would adore in silence.”—Lord Bolingbroke, v. 315.

It is needless to extract other of the many similar passages in this writer’s works, thus explicitly condemning the views by which he and other deists have condemned Christianity. Nor is it the least justification to say, that Lord Bolingbroke, as he did not believe the Scripture, considered the attributes therein ascribed to God, as unwarrantable assumptions of the biblical writers, and, therefore, is not presumptuous nor inconsistent with the views above quoted on that subject. I contend that Lord Bolingbroke has no where given us any reason whatever to discredit the credibility or authority of the Bible writers by any fair investigation, but has condemned their writings and Christianity together, for the non-conformity of God’s nature and attributes, as there exhibited to those which he had conceived he should possess. At the same time he has continually asserted, and correctly too, that we could form no ideas of those attributes beyond power and intelligence, as manifested in his material works. And a further proof of his enormous contradiction on this subject is expressly furnished by himself, where he admits the existence of moral anomalies in God’s government.

Thus, he says, “Every thing shows the wisdom and power of God, conformably to our ideas of wisdom and power, in the physical world and in the moral. But every thing does not show, in like manner, the justice and goodness of God, conformably to our ideas of those attributes in either. The theist (deist) acknowledges whatever God has done to be just and good in itself, *though it does not appear such in every instance, conformably to his ideas of justice and goodness.* He imputes the difference to the defect of his ideas, and not to any defect of the divine attributes,” &c.—Lord Bolingbroke, v. 331.

Yet, notwithstanding the glaring inconsistency between the principles that Lord Bolingbroke lays down for correct reasoning, and his manner of determining in defiance of them, how greatly must any one be astonished when he reads his views upon EVIL; for they so abundantly exhibit the malicious prejudice that dictated what he has said concerning "the God of Moses," &c., as quoted on page 98, that though it is a departure from my original plan of not making any exhibition of the inconsistency of such writers, I will make two further extracts to show how the most intellectual of such writers can believe in any thing, provided it is not exhibited under the authority of the Bible, though the instances be exactly parallel cases. Thus he says,

"True it is, that men are sometimes involved in general calamities which they can neither foresee nor prevent, such as inundations, earthquakes, pestilences, *and the entire devastations of kingdoms or provinces by savage and barbarous people, like the Huns of old, or the Spaniards in later ages.* But these calamities are rare. *They may be considered as chastisements, for chastisements are reasonable, when there are any to be amended by partaking them or by being at least spectators of them.* They may be considered as the mere effects, natural, though contingent of matter and motion, in a material system, put into motion under certain general laws. *If they are seen in the first light, (i. e. of chastisements,) they should teach mankind to adore and to fear that providence which governs the world by particular as well as general dispensations.* If they are seen in the second, (i. e. as mere effects, &c.,) *they should suggest some other reflections, which are not without their utility neither.*"—Lord Bolingbroke, v. 403, 404.

"Cotta,* who exercises greater injustice towards God, than any of the tyrants he quotes did towards men, is much scandalized that those two eyes of the Mediterranean coast, CORINTH and CARTHAGE, were put out, &c. *But how did he know that Mummius and Scipio, (the Roman generals by whom these cities were destroyed,) were not instruments of the justice of Providence, as well as of Roman policy and passion.* The worst men, and the Romans were none of the best, are employed to punish the worst. None so fitted for the task. They are the instruments, and in their turns the examples of divine justice. The wealth, the splendor, the magnificence of

*Cotta is the person, in Cicero's treatise on the Nature of the Gods, who represented the Academics, and who disputed the arguments advanced by the Stoics, the Natural Theologians of that day, to prove the providence of the gods of Greece and Rome. The extract we made from Cicero's treatise in page 68, is the commencement of this very discourse, that has excited Lord Bolingbroke's displeasure, as stated in the above extract.

Corinth were great, but Corinth was a sink of iniquity. Carthage was a great and powerful state, but the Carthagenians were a faithless, factious, and cruel people. *Might not these be the remote and true causes* (i. e. for the judgment of God upon them) whatever the immediate and apparent were of their destruction.”—Lord Bolingbroke, v. 438.

Now, since Lord Bolingbroke, thus distinctly, has justified the moral punishments of God, in the two preceding instances, surely he must be condemned as a most prejudiced and malicious writer, when he impugns the inspiration of the Scriptures for an exhibition of similar judgments. For it is impossible for cases to be more exactly parallel, than those admitted by himself in the facts of the two preceding extracts, and those related of the invasion of Canaan by the Jews, the extermination of the Amalakites, as well as certain other relations of biblical history, to which he, and other deists object, as being utterly derogatory to the infinite perfections of the Deity. Now, by what rule of logic, or propriety, can the one be condemned and the other justified; and yet, we not only see this eminent individual has done this, but the infidel writers of our day, continue to do the same thing in glaring violation of all right rules of reasoning. The consummation of absurd proceeding is thus evinced, according to their own doctrine, which asserts, that we cannot perceive what God’s attributes are. Then, it is evidently impossible for us to say, what is or what is not consistent with his real nature and attributes, since they are both unknown and unattainable to our research.

But as my undertaking is to vindicate Christianity, as regarded under the influence of a rational scepticism alone, and not to assail the advocates of deism, and show their errors, I shall not pursue this subject any further. I will alone add the judgment of the atheists, upon the rationality of the deistical system. If these last can justify themselves, by the merits of their abstract reasoning, it will be then, and not until then, necessary for us to resume our controversy with them.

“The deist exclaims,” says Baron Holbach, (*Good Sense*, parag. 118,) “abstain from worshipping the cruel, capricious God of theology (Christianity;) mine is a being infinitely wise and good; he is the father of men, the mildest of sovereigns; it is he who fills the universe with his benefits. But do you not see that every thing in this world, contradicts the good qualities which you ascribe to your God? In the numerous family of this tender father, almost all are unhappy. Under the government of this sovereign, vice is triumphant and vir-

true in distress. Among those blessings you extol, and which alone your enthusiasm would see, I behold a multitude of evils of every kind, against which you obstinately shut your eyes. Forced to acknowledge that your beneficent God, in contradiction with himself, distributes good and evil with the same hand, for his justification, you must, like the priest, refer me to the regions of another life. Invent, therefore, another God; for yours is no less contradictory than that of the theologians."

"A good God, who does evil, or consents to the commission of evil; a God full of equity, and in whose empire innocence is often oppressed; a perfect God who produces none but imperfect and miserable works; is not such a God, and his conduct as great mysteries, as that of the Incarnation."*

The object of my discourse hitherto, has not been to justify Christianity in any manner whatever, but only to place the subject in a fair light and position, that we may fully scrutinize its actual merits, under the most enlightened judgment with which it may be regarded. In arranging matters for this purpose, I have assumed nothing; every argument I have maintained, and every position I

*Let no one fall into the great error of supposing, that these objections of the atheists, have any bearing on the theory of Christianity, although they do entirely overwhelm the theory of the deists. The reason of this, is, that *the foundations* of the two systems are altogether different, though their features of exhibition may be similar in certain leading points.

The *foundation* of the deistical theory, is necessarily restricted to those arguments, inferences, or judgments, that arise from an inspection of material things, and the deductions that men can make from such observations. If, therefore, inconsistencies and contradictions are clearly discernable in the system, as estimated by human reason, it certainly is neither a true nor a rational system, and the objections of the atheists have thus distinctly exhibited the theory of the deists.

But Christianity rests upon a different *foundation*. It represents God to have made man an intelligent creature, who is, in the present life, undergoing a probationary discipline, to prepare him for ulterior purposes in eternity, and this and every other dogma of our faith, be they what they may, are *direct revelations* from the Creator of all things. No objection, therefore, of the atheist, can have a bearing upon the theory of Christianity, because the infinite wisdom of the supposed Creator in his appointments, can never be impeached by the differing opinion or judgment of man, who is an imperfect and limited being. The fact whether Christianity be of divine revelation or not, is a subject that may be either proved or disproved. The theory of Christianity is susceptible neither of proof nor objection. If the atheists can disprove the existence of a Creator, or Fabricator to the universe, it is all well—but certainly their difference of opinion, with the supposed creator of all things, as to the propriety with which the universe ought to have been constructed, is not simply no argument, but it is a most presumptuous absurdity.

But we have already discussed this subject with the atheists, directly at page 36, &c., and indirectly, in our discourse on Moral Distinctions, especially at page 91, where we have shown, I apprehend, with sufficient clearness, that all our notions concerning justice, virtue, morality, &c. are the arrogant assumptions of men, who have made their welfare the sole standard, by which any state or condition of existence is to be estimated.

have taken, has been sustained by simple and undeniable proofs. I have very freely used the expositions of the more intellectual atheists and deists on such points, not only as being of a less suspicious character than many of those opinions, maintained by Christian writers, but also, because I consider that in certain instances, the atheistical and deistical arguments on the abstract points, are the truest, however much they have erred in the conclusion drawn from them.

The deduction to be made from our previous examination and analysis, is undoubtedly this: from the examination of the material universe we learn nothing whatever concerning the actual nature of God, or of his attributes, beyond his intelligence and power. Except in these two particulars alone, every other attribute is entirely unknown and inscrutable. And this is the view taken on this subject by all the intellectual deists themselves.

Then all that we claim for Christianity is, that it shall not be supposed condemnable for any statement it has made concerning Jehovah, or his proceeding with mankind on the very intelligible ground that we know nothing whatever concerning his nature or attributes.

We do not make the least claim, that because God is, in his nature, incomprehensible, that the Scripture exhibitions of his providential acts are, therefore, to be considered true, because no one can show them to be false. Such is not our argument in the least degree; all we contend for is, that the nature and attributes of Jehovah shall be considered as inscrutable as the God of Nature is admitted to be by the deists. Place them precisely in the same incomprehensible condition of being, as regards their attributes and ultimate purposes, and we are satisfied.

But this God of whom we cannot discern any other attributes than those of infinite intelligence and power, the biblical writers assert has made a formal revelation of himself to mankind, instituted religious worship, and confirmed these particulars to them by the exhibition of miraculous power, or such acts as Deity could alone perform. Now surely God could reveal himself in this manner if he pleased. On this point there can be no dispute. The only question is, did God do as he is represented to have done in the Scriptures. On this question we are at issue with the deists, and on this alone, and surely nothing can be plainer, after our preceding exhibition, than that the veracity, or the falsehood of the Bible writers is the only subject we can possibly examine, in order to decide whether the religious system taught in those books is to be credited or not.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE MEANS OF ASCERTAINING THE CREDIBILITY DUE TO HUMAN TESTIMONY.

BEFORE we proceed to exhibit the various arguments that shall establish the credibility of the biblical writers, it is necessary that we should lay down some general principles concerning the credibility of witnesses and the means of ascertaining the truth of their statements. This subject was announced in our introductory discourse, at page 24, as constituting the fourth test, which it was indispensably necessary to understand before we could proceed to determine the question of the truth or the falsehood of the Christian religion.

Though it is impossible to lay down any determinate rule whereby we can positively ascertain the credibility of a witness or writer, yet the ascertaining their true characters is by no means difficult, when we study their history, their interests, and the means they employ to accomplish their various purposes. In the complicated events and transactions of human life, it is impossible for men to conceal, altogether, their real motives. The page of universal history has enlightened us so much concerning the constitution of human nature that it is almost impossible we can be at any loss in discerning the true character of individuals, when any continuous relation can be procured of their history or actions.

The general principles by which we must be guided in forming our opinions upon human testimony, and the credibility to which it is entitled, must be estimated by our knowledge of human nature, whether as according to our own experience, or by the study of the past history of mankind.

This principle has been laid down so clearly by Hume, that I shall use his authority by the following extract: (Essay on Liberty and Necessity, sec. 8th.)

“It is universally acknowledged, that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions. The same events follow from the same causes. Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit; these passions mixed in various degrees, and distributed through society, have been from the begin-

ning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises which have ever been observed among mankind. Mankind are so much the same in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use, is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature, by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations, and furnishing us with materials, from which we may form our observations, and become acquainted with the regular springs of human action and behavior. These records of wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions, are so many collections of experiments, by which the politician or moral philosopher fixes the principles of his science, in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects, by the experiments which he forms concerning them. Nor are the earth, water, and other elements, examined by Aristotle and Hippocrates, more like to those which at present lie under our observation, than the men described by Polybius and Tacitus are to those who now govern the world.

Should a traveller, returning from a far country, bring us an account of men wholly different from any with whom we were ever acquainted; men who were entirely divested of avarice, ambition, or revenge; who knew no pleasure but friendship, generosity, and public spirit; we should immediately, from these circumstances, detect the falsehood, and prove him a liar, with the same certainty as if he had stuffed his narration with stories of centaurs and dragons, miracles, and prodigies."

But though these principles, as laid down by Hume, are perfectly correct, and clearly demonstrate that we have a sufficient foundation in the common constitution of human nature, whereby we may judge of the real character of individuals, although involved in a very complicated mass of events and particulars; yet, the difficulty is very great, in the first place, to acquire this requisite amount of knowledge, and in the second, to apply that knowledge without prejudice or partiality.

Supposing, however, the reader has studied the history of mankind as a philosophical subject, and is in possession of a sufficient number of facts to guide his judgment, let us ascertain how we must proceed, in order to judge correctly of the real character of those persons, whose eminence or notoriety in past time, renders their true character matters of interesting speculation.

Before we can undertake to investigate the real character of an individual, we must first determine, if possible, what is the common na-

ture or constitution of mankind. After we have ascertained that fact, we may proceed to estimate the force of motives that induce men to act under those peculiar circumstances, by which the life of any individual has been characterized.

What then is the common constitution of mankind? What is it that constitutes that resemblance that is universally admitted to distinguish human nature?

As far as I have been able to comprehend this subject, it seems to me that the phenomena of man's moral existence, exhibits most distinctly the fact, that his amount of inconsistencies defy any reduction to one common character. It is undeniable, that the best and wisest of men, at times, do evil and foolish things. The profligate and unjust, at times, do things that are wise and beneficial. At times, the weakest prejudices rule the wisest and best of men, and again, a fair exposition of truth induces thousands to change their opinions and mode of life. Some persons will not do any thing they esteem wrong to save their lives or fortunes, and again, there are some who, restrained by no sense of the rights of other men, boldly hazard their life and fortune, to obtain those objects which others again would not take if offered to them.

In short, the common moral constitution of human nature, is involved in such an amount of contradictions and inconsistencies, that it is impossible for us to assume what the common constitution of human nature is, unless by a long specification of its divers contradictory features.

But we have hitherto regarded human nature as characterized by exhibitions which, however anomalous they may be, are the result of a natural or honest amount of imperfections. How much more intricate does the speculation become, when we advert to the notorious fact, that men continually act under the influence of motives which the individual hides with all conscious deceit or hypocrisy from the world, and under an honest and philanthropic exhibition, aims at accomplishing an unprincipled purpose. The world is full of such instances; our own experience satisfies us of this fact in the ordinary transactions of life, and the page of history abundantly exhibits the great and the renowned of the earth, in too many instances, to have been both unprincipled and unjust, at the very time that they made an exhibition of honor, piety, and philanthropy.

But though these instances of deceitful conduct are sufficiently numerous to keep us ever on our guard, that we be not deceived by any amount of honorable professions, yet, none but those who are conscious of an unprincipled inclination, will deny there are many

honest and virtuous individuals in every state and condition of life, who, undefiled by any conscious deceitfulness, have passed their lives in all honor and integrity, promoting the welfare and happiness of mankind.

But, however anomalous and inconsistent our own experience and the testimony of history may represent the moral constitution of human nature, yet there are certain principles that regulate the conduct of mankind, and which, if properly estimated, will most commonly enable us to bring the greatest amount of anomaly or hypocrisy into an exhibition, that with great distinctness, shows the real character of the individual. Thus there are no actions of men that are not induced by motives, and which though at first capable of several different explanations, may very fairly be all reduced to a single motive; this prime motive to all human action, is **INTEREST**: *the unprincipled, pursuing that object without any other restraint than fear or policy; the moral or religious, only so far as is permitted by their sense of obligation or duty.* It would be useless for us to attempt to state the various modifications under which the interest of individuals develops itself. To do this, we should have to enumerate every exhibition of human nature, from the most vaulting ambition, down to the silliest vanity, together with every variety and degree of animal indulgence, from the most innocent gratification to the most unlimited sensuality. It will be sufficient for our purpose, to admit the influence of the *principle of interest*, as just stated to exist in every human action, and leave any particular exhibition to the conscious estimate of the reader.

The next step towards appreciating the true character of an individual, is, that the inquirer should divest himself of all prejudice or partiality, and then very patiently proceed to investigate all those circumstances, acts, and professions, that are implicated in the greatest amount of history, that can be procured of the particular individual. The greater the number of particulars, and the greater the variety of feature which they exhibit, the more accurate will be our determination of his character.

Having now given a general view of the constitution of human nature, and the principle by which human actions are excited, we have a plain course before us, by which we may, with little perplexity, ascertain whether the writers of the Bible are creditable in their statements or not. Their motives and conduct are to be estimated by the knowledge we have of human nature, and the experience that history furnishes us of men in similar situations. The only source of perplexity attending our future investigation, and which we must now provide

against, is for the occurrence of those circumstances that are capable of being construed by the ascription of different motives; the one of which, an adversary may contend, have been criminal, while an advocate may consider them to have been honest and virtuous. In what manner must we at such times decide between the correctness of the inferences that the disputing parties have advanced.

Here then is a source of considerable embarrassment; for the advocate of one opinion is not entitled to consider his opponent less wise, less judicious, less honest, than himself, and they should, therefore, endeavor, if possible, to find a solution to the particular difficulty, that they may be able to proceed to a just judgment on the whole subject.

I apprehend, where two intellectual men differ in their estimate concerning any particular subject that involves the truth or the falsehood of the Scripture writings, the rational course must be, to ascertain *the particular cause* of their disagreement. Where the parties are both honest and intellectual, we may safely say, their difference arises from one or the other having reasoned incorrectly on the facts of the case. If we then ascertain the particular points of their difference, these subjects can then be detached, and be subjected to a critical analysis and discussion, by which, for the most part, the value of the conflicting arguments can be ascertained, and by them the merits of the contested subject.

Upon this most difficult part of an intellectual scrutiny, concerning the character of an individual, where we are required to determine between the inferential arguments of two capable reasoners, though we can furnish no positive rule by which we are to decide correctly, yet, I apprehend a very considerable amount of the difficulty may be removed, by an attentive consideration of the following suggestion.

So long as this supposed difficulty between two intelligent men consists in their different estimation of the value of a particular action, or the inferring of the true motives of the individual, under the influence of peculiar circumstances, I apprehend every honest inquirer will be immensely assisted in coming to a correct conclusion, by applying to the controverted points, that system of rules which our Courts of Law have established concerning the admission and value of *Evidence* in all legal proceedings.

As the philosophical system of the Courts of Law upon this subject has never been formerly applied to my knowledge, to the solution of difficulties beyond the precincts of the Courts, I beg leave to say a few words upon this subject, which I deem to be of the greatest

importance, towards enabling us to determine, with greater correctness, the principles and motives by which the real character of an individual is to be ascertained.

It is barely necessary to call the reader's attention to the nature of the business transacted in our Courts of Law. All the various and complicated transactions of man, under all possible varieties of exhibition, come before legal tribunals, in order that justice shall be done the contending parties, whether, in particulars that concern life, property, or liberty.

The first object before the court, is to ascertain the true merits of the litigated question. To accomplish this end, every subject that is capable of throwing light on its merits, is brought before a jury by opposing advocates, who, for the most part, endeavor to give their arguments, or proofs, a greater value than they are entitled to, at the same time, that they attempt to under-estimate those of their opponent.

To assist the jury in correctly estimating the true value of the evidence produced on the case, the courts have established a number of rules upon this subject, the great importance and value of which, may be at once appreciated, in the fact, that these rules have been derived from the long experience of disinterested and intellectual men, who, for centuries, have been employed in scrutinizing, and developing truth, as implicated in all the multiplied transactions of human life, whether in its most excellent, or in its most depraved modes of exhibition, and in which, both presumption of motives and estimate of intentions, constitute most important subjects of investigation before the jury.*

But as this subject involves an extensive view of human nature, scientifically reduced to principles, upon which the actual proceeding of Courts of Law are based, we cannot, from its great extent,

*The rules of court, in their practical operation, are thus exhibited by a most intellectual writer, whose work cannot be too highly appreciated by the moralist or philosopher.

"The office of the jury is to ascertain the existence of facts, by means of the judgment, which they form of the credibility of witnesses, and by inferences which they make from the circumstances submitted to their consideration. For the due discharge of this important function, they are supposed to be peculiarly well qualified by their experience of the conduct, affairs, and dealings of mankind, and the manners and customs of society. In this respect, and to this extent, the law confides implicitly in their knowledge, experience, and discretion. *It interferes no further, than by laying down cautionary rules, to prevent the jury from being deceived or misled, by providing, as far as can be done, that the evidence of none but faith-worthy witnesses shall be admitted, and by excluding all such as flows from corrupt or suspicious sources. Having done this, the rest is left to the conscience and discretion of the jury.*"—Starkie on Evidence, i. 3—note d.

make any particular exhibition in our present discourse. The subject must be studied at large, in the philosophy of the law, and I think, no honest, intellectual man, can undertake it, who will not, at every step, find himself enlightened, and remarkably instructed how to estimate, and appreciate the true value of evidence, or credibility, as implicated in the general history of human nature.

The correctness of an application of the rules of Courts of Law concerning evidence, to an investigation of the credibility of the biblical writers, is very manifest. As we have sufficiently shown that the whole importance, and truth of the Scripture writings, depend upon the credibility of their writers—so we can regulate an investigation of that subject, and especially, upon all more obscure and doubtful points, by a reference to those philosophical principles by which Courts of Law proceed, in analogous instances. Since the procedure of our courts is universally recognized by every honest, intelligent man, to be the very best means in our power, by which truth may be ascertained in all the complicated transactions of human life—so it is evidently impossible, that an argument on the credibility of the Scripture writers, can be placed under the regulation of a more rational and intellectual scheme of principles. As the reasoning of the courts upon this subject, seems to be the perfection of reason, according to the light of the present age: so, I apprehend, any one must be conscious of the weakness of his argument, or position, that objects to try its strength, by those rules that mankind have universally approved for estimating the value of evidence, as deciding the most important interests of our social condition.

The plan, therefore, upon which we must proceed to ascertain the credibility of those persons who have written the Scripture books, is, to judge of them by the experience we have of human nature. We must attempt to appreciate their motives in acting, and the whole influence of the system they promulgated. We must not only directly scrutinize their conduct personally, but we must take a comprehensive view of all those circumstantial particulars involved in their proceedings, as characterising the history of entire centuries. In short, we must judge of their credibility by all and every of those particulars by which human integrity can be tested, as furnished by the examples of past ages of time.

CHAPTER V.

CORRECTIONS OF THE VALUES OF CERTAIN ARGUMENTS COMMONLY
ADVANCED BY THE ADVOCATES OF CHRISTIANITY, AND THE REAL-
LY IMPORTANT OR PRIME ARGUMENT STATED.

As my views upon the subject of the Evidences of Christianity differ, in certain leading features, from those of many other writers upon that subject, I shall not proceed with my exhibition of proof until I have made some important corrections as to certain specific arguments commonly made use of by those who undertake to defend the truth of revelation. These, in my opinion, are in many respects placed too high in value as arguments, and have, from this circumstance, been somewhat prejudicial to the Christian cause; for failing in the maximum of strength assigned them, the reduction of their value in the field of controversy with the deists, not only places them below their actual value, but, indeed, on some occasions, seems to argue a defeat on the general issue.

Of the various arguments by which Christianity is commonly vindicated, none is more prominent than the assumption that is impossible the Scriptures could have been forged and imposed on the Jews or first Christians; for as they contain so many remarkable histories and statements which have been, from all time, universally accredited by them, it is impossible there could have ever been a time when they were ignorant of such occurrences. Therefore, to suppose the Scriptures were a forgery which had been brought to the knowledge of the people, at a time when they were entirely ignorant of such subjects, is absurd; for the people would naturally say, how is this? this is the first time we have ever heard of such things. And hence it is supposed it would be impossible to persuade the people of the truth of such statements. Now we know the Jews and early Christians never had any doubt on these matters, and, therefore, it is incredible the Scriptures can be a forgery.

But this manner of reasoning is altogether deficient as argument for the conviction of doubt and incredulity; for it is notorious, from the religious defections of the Jews, that the nation at large exercised but little belief, at times, in the system under which they

were placed by Moses; and hence they neither regarded nor concerned themselves with what might be written in their sacred books. At times so entirely had they thrown off their allegiance to Jehovah, that, in the kingdom of Israel, he alone knew those who had abstained from the worship of Baal; for the prophet Elijah declared that he knew of none. And in the history of the kingdom of Judah we learn the apparently astounding fact, that, in the days of king Josiah, both him and the high-priest were so positively ignorant of the contents of the sacred books, that they did not know what was contained in the law of Moses, (2 *Chron.* xxxiv. 14 to 19.) Hence it was the monarch tore his garments as expressive of the sorrow that both him and his people had so much transgressed the requirements of the law of Moses.

Many persons to get over the embarrassment attending this fact, have supposed that the book found by the high-priest was the autograph of Moses, which is very possible; but admitting this to be the case, it does not remove the objection in the sight of the sceptic, for if copies of the law were common among the Jews, the reading of Moses's autograph could have conveyed no information that they had not in the copies. But it is evident that by reading this book, king Josiah, though then twenty-six years of age, and after a religious education and life, received information of which he had been previously ignorant.

Nevertheless, it does not follow that there were not a greater or less number of religious persons at that very time, who both held copies of the Scripture and regulated their lives by its precepts.

But whatever explanation may be made concerning this seemingly remarkable ignorance of the king and high-priest, it must be evident, that none but a Jew or Christian can appreciate the circumstance as being consistent with that great traditional reverence attributed to the Jews in the preservation of the Scripture writings; and no deist or sceptic can receive a satisfactory solution to his doubt, until the general history and institutions of the Jewish people shall be so distinctly vindicated in their integrity, that the existence of anomalous circumstances can be admitted to have taken place, without necessarily infirming the whole system.

And finally, on this point, when to special objections made by the deists or sceptics from particulars stated in the Bible itself, the undeniable fact is urged that religious forgeries and impostures have taken place with other nations who believe in such writings as confidently as we do in the Scriptures, it is impossible that any one, sceptically inclined, shall admit more than that the integrity of the

Jewish Scripture seems to have been better guarded from human frauds, than the religious books of any other ancient people. But such an admission as this would by no means imply that the Bible was to be esteemed of divine dictation.

Another argument as it is called, in favor of the Scriptures, arises from the exhibition of fragments of extracts made from ancient Pagan writers, that testify more or less directly to the truth of certain historic matters related in the Bible. Now the historic narrative of the Scripture, divested of its peculiar theological exhibitions, I presume no intellectual sceptic would care to admit, for their scruples do not regard such particulars, but the fact, did God act, did God reveal himself as is related in the Bible?

Indeed Lord Bolingbroke, a professed deist, recognizes distinctly a greater or less amount of historic truth in the Scripture narrations.*

By these observations, I do not undervalue, in the least degree, any of those literary labors on Pagan antiquity that tend to confirm any Scripture relation. All I contend is, that such illustrations, though they are valuable *confirmations* of the truth of the Scripture relations, are not *arguments* to convince the incredulous that the Scriptures are of divine authority. It is only by appreciating the true value or importance of every position bearing on this subject, that we shall be enabled to apply our strength in right place.

I also consider that the argument as commonly founded on the miracles related in the Scripture history, are wholly inoperative in our present investigation, for before any one can admit the value of miraculous testimony, he must be confident that the miracle actually occurred, that they are neither forgeries nor artfully exaggerated accounts of natural events, nor the dextrous exhibitions of priestly

* "I am willing to suppose that these impure channels are pure, (i. e. Egyptian, Phœnician, Chaldean, Indian, and Greek traditions and histories, such as they are extracted by the defenders of the Bible,) and that they have conveyed these anecdotes down to us just as they stood in the ancient books from which they are said to be taken. What will this concession prove? That there were various traditions in a most remote antiquity, concerning the creation, the flood, and the destruction of Sodom, about Abraham and other patriarchs, about David and other kings of the Jews. It will show (i. e. this concession) that the Phœnicians, the Egyptians, the Israelites, and probably every one of the eastern nations, had their systems of traditions, whereof that of the Old Testament alone is come down to us entire. The same names and many circumstances of the same events must of course have been mentioned in all. But such a conformity proves nothing. As they agreed in some, they might differ in other particulars, and the whole tenor of those that are lost might be repugnant to one another, and to that of the Jews. Abraham was a name famous in all of them. Isaac was known to the Arabians as well as Ishmael, and Ishmael to the Jews as well as Isaac; but they tell very different stories about the legitimacy, and rank, and favor with God of the two brothers," &c.—Lord Bolingbroke, v. 322.

contrivance. But in what manner is the sceptic to be convinced that the miracles related in the Bible did actually occur, unimpeachable by the preceding suspicions. All reference to the steady unwavering belief of the Jews, or of the early Christians, to the truth of the Scripture miracles, is an argument of no force whatever in the present instance, for not only have we, in a preceding page, shown that such a position cannot be sustained, but it must be evident, that such an argument would justify a belief in the miraculous transactions of the Hindoo Mythology, which indeed, are contained in books perhaps of equal antiquity with those ascribed to Moses.

It seems to me there prevails among the Christian world, such erroneous views of the value of the miracles related in the Bible, that it will be a matter of no little consequence to exhibit them aright, for I hardly know of any subject involved in the truth of the Scripture that is more improperly judged, whether by Christians or deists.

It would be a waste of time to define what a miracle is, every one understands their nature without any explanation from us. But concerning their value as testimony, men fall into the greatest mistakes, unless they are careful to distinguish them *in time*, as being present or past, as being seen by ourselves, or as being related by others.

If a man professes to be a messenger from God, communicating some religious command or doctrine, he ought to confirm the truth of his statement by the exhibition of some credential from that God by whom he asserts he has been sent. If such a person exhibits any display of supernatural power or intelligence, which is unimpeachable on the score of any artful dexterity, or delusion, it is impossible that any reasonable man, actually seeing and judging of the miracle, shall hesitate to acknowledge the authority or commission of the messenger.

But the case is entirely different with those persons who have not witnessed the miracle themselves. They can only believe the fact of its having occurred by the unhesitating reliance they place *in the credibility* of those who actually witnessed its exhibition, and who have reported the circumstance.

Miracles, then, as witnessed in their fulfilment, are overwhelming evidence to the truth of the doctrine or injunction implicated with that exhibition of supernatural power, and which no sane man could undertake to reject.

But the degree of authority we are to concede to the historic relation of miracles that took place in past time, is a matter that requires intellectual discernment and judgment, not as to the possibility

of the miracle itself, but as to the credibility, capacity, and disinterestedness of the narrator.

But to avoid any ambiguity by attempting to speak generally on this subject, let us at once come to the point of interest, *to wit*, the Scripture miracles, and ascertain their actual value as evidence under the peculiarity of circumstances with which they are invested.

In what manner can the miracles, which are related in the Bible to have been accomplished some thousand years ago, be used *to confirm the truth of that religious system* taught us in the Scriptures?

If the Egyptians, Phœnicians, Chaldeans, &c., had left us explicit testimony concerning the miraculous events of Jewish history, no one would be justified in rejecting such testimony, but as we have no such independent relation from those nations, it must be evident, we would never have heard of the miracles but from the circumstance of their being recorded in the Scripture. If they had not been recorded there, we should be as absolutely ignorant of their having been exhibited, as much so, as if they had never taken place. Consequently, all the credit we may give to any miraculous event related in the Scripture, depends wholly upon the credibility of the writers of the Scripture, for it is impossible for us to obtain any independent proof that the miracle has occurred.

The first step then, and before we can use the authority of the miracle, is to establish the absolute credibility of the relator, and if this be done to our entire satisfaction, we believe that the miracle did actually occur as related. But what do we gain by such a procedure towards vindicating the religious doctrines taught in the Scriptures. In my view, we have gained no weight of argument by substantiating the miracle, for if we have been able *to establish the credibility of the biblical writers to that degree, that we can unhesitatingly believe on their authority, that the miracle took place*, we surely may at once believe on the score of that credibility, the doctrines that are announced to us, for to establish the truth of the doctrine or system, the miracle itself was originally exhibited.

Since a past miracle can have no argument or demonstration of its truth embodied in itself, but is absolutely dependant upon historic relation, I apprehend they cannot in themselves, be brought forward as matters of evidence to us of the present day. Their whole force, as divine evidence appears to have been exhausted upon the eye-witnesses, and they have come down to us simply as matters of historic truth, which we should alone be required to vindicate as being free from any fraudulent imputation, as the contrivance or forgery of knavish impostors. But I do not perceive how it is possible, to give them directly the force of divine evidences, since their credibility

depends exclusively on the character of the relator. It is a most glaring instance of what the logicians call *arguing in a circle*, to prove the Scripture by the miracles, and then prove the miracles by the Scripture.

In thus assigning what I think the actual value of miracles,* let no one suppose, that I am of that less than semi-Christian school, which, under the plea of rationality, undertakes to do away every thing that implies the visible, divine agency of God, so as to make the miracles of the Scripture, mere matters of ordinary and natural occurrence, which, men, in their simplicity and love of the marvelous, have magnified into miraculous interpositions. I hold no such notion, but receive the biblical relations of miraculous transaction without the least difficulty, or hesitation, on the score of the actual divine agency in performing such exhibitions: nevertheless, I receive them not as matters of religious faith, but as being historic truths, essentially connected with the consistency of Scripture narration, and as inseparable from it, as much so as the relation of ordinary and natural occurrences in the Jewish history.

And as matters of historic relation and occurrence, it is just as possible that the miraculous transactions, recorded in the Bible, may be incorrectly stated, as any other historic relation, and if sufficient argument is produced, to justify the belief that any particular miracle of the Scripture is incorrectly related, or that it be an interpolation, it would cost me no more moral exertion to correct or cancel the biblical statement, than it would to correct, or cancel, any mere historical relation in the history of the kings of Judah or Israel, nor would the procedure weaken my belief in the doctrines taught in the Scripture in the least degree, since I hold them true, from arguments wholly independent of the accuracy with which miraculous transactions may be stated.†

* Lord Brougham, in his Treatise on Natural Theology, a work I have but just seen, has advanced so strange a notion on the subject of the value of miraculous evidence, that I must beg leave, to offer a short comment on that opinion, in the first Appendix to this work.

† It is by no means incredible, that some of the miracles related in the Bible, have been interpolated in the text from Apocryphal books, and which never did occur. The miracle of the Sun and Moon standing still, at the command of Joshua, is very obnoxious to such a suspicion, without noticing other instances.

Now if this miracle has been inserted from the apocryphal book of Jasher, how many persons have there been that have regarded it as an eminent proof of the divine providence of God to the Jewish nation, and yet, it is possible, the relation is wholly untrue. The mere relation of a miraculous transaction in the Bible, therefore, does not prove that such an event took place. And not until the miracle be proved true, can it be urged as an evidence of divine approbation. And certainly if we can adduce sufficient evidence to believe the miracles, we can believe in our religious doctrines at the present time, without assistance of the miracles.

I apprehend that I am fully sustained in this view of the value of miracles by the highest authority. Our Saviour, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, seems to state this emphatically. The rich man requested Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brethren, lest they should come to the same condemnation; to whom Abraham replies, they have Moses and the prophets. Nay, says the rich man, father Abraham, but if one should go to them from the dead; if, replies Abraham, they do not believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one should rise from the dead.

If any inference is justifiable from our Saviour's observation, it is that there is an amount of evidence somewhere in the writings of "Moses and the prophets," that is greater in its intrinsic value than that implied in the miraculous return of a man from the dead to warn the living of future judgment; than which there can be no greater miracle.

Now, certainly, the relation of the miraculous transactions in the times of Moses and the prophets did not constitute the evidence which our Saviour says was to be discerned in their writings; for the force of an ocular exhibition of Lazarus returning from the dead to the brethren of the rich man would be, assuredly, greater evidence to them than a relation by others of the past miracles of Jewish history, which they could not have seen. But our Saviour says, explicitly, that the evidence to be discerned in examining the writings of Moses and the prophets was *greater* than the actual miraculous exhibition of the deceased Lazarus to the eyes of the brethren of the rich man.

Let it be our undertaking, then, to ascertain this evidence in Moses and the prophets; that is as great, if not greater, than that conveyed by actually witnessing the stupendous miracle of a man raised from the dead.

But to return to the consideration of the improper value assigned by Christian writers to certain arguments by which they undertake to vindicate the Scripture writings.

The excellent morality taught in the Scriptures is no proof of their divine original. As exhibiting the best and most perfect scheme of morals with which we are acquainted, Christianity is to be considered the best and most perfect system of which we have any knowledge. But, nevertheless, this will not establish its claim of being a divine institution, for however men may delude and impose upon their fellow men, they can only do so under the guise of morality and religion. No impostor or knave can desire that mankind should be otherwise than under the influence of virtuous or moral in-

stitutions; for, as such, the very authority of the impostors themselves would be sustained. Excellent codes of morality, therefore, being both useful to such persons, and commendatory in the eyes of the people at large, it must be very evident that no moral institutions, however beneficial they may be, are any guarantee that the promulgator of the system is not an impostor.*

Where the system of morality is so absolutely faultless as that promulgated in the Scriptures,† that fact is a most important *confirmation* of its divine institution.

Neither can we consider the prophecies, generally speaking, to furnish direct evidence for the purpose of convincing the unbeliever or incredulity of sceptics. Their chief and important use is, to strengthen and confirm the faith of believers. Thus, for the most part, the prophecies are delivered in the indirect language of metaphors, and symbolic representations, which, in order to comprehend, it is necessary that the individual should be well imbued in a knowledge of the Scripture writings, which is never the case with an incredulous and sceptical person.

When prophecy has been well studied, it becomes a powerful assistant to the faith of believers, as all such will readily admit. But to use prophecy as evidence of the inspiration of the Scripture to a person sceptically inclined, seems to me almost a hopeless proceeding. Such persons are not only ignorant of the signification of the symbolic figures employed in the prophetic annunciations, but they cherish a direct prejudice against the whole theory of the Scripture writings themselves, to such a degree, that they are actually incapable of making the exertion necessary to comprehend the scope of the prophetic intimations. Hence, with the smallest exhibition of the fulfilment of prophecy, they immediately resort to the supposition, that the prediction cannot be proved to have been written prior to its apparent fulfilment; which negative position, however unreasonable it may be, is not only difficult to disprove, but in the more ancient instances, impossible.

* Lest any one should misunderstand me on this subject, I will simply ask, if, supposing the morality of the Christian religion be altogether unknown, whether would the then next best or most perfect system be, in that fact, entitled to be considered of divine appointment? If it would not be so entitled, then neither is Christianity to be so considered at present.

Christianity is, as far as we can perceive, perfect in its morality, and this feature is altogether confirmatory of its claim to be considered of divine appointment; but this excellency of itself is not sufficient to establish that it is of divine appointment.

† All the intellectual deists have expressly admitted the superior excellence of Christianity as a moral system over every other system whatever. We shall, in a more suitable place, quote their very expression of that opinion.

I shall, therefore, make no use of arguments derived from the fulfilment of prophecy, in this essay, as addressed to the sceptical reader, until I have established such a foundation, for the truth of the Christian religion, that the fulfilment of the Scripture prophecies shall be discerned an evident seal of the approbation of Christianity, by that Being who can alone be supposed to know the events of futurity.

Having now exhibited every subject which I can perceive to interfere with a strictly rational investigation concerning the actual truth of the Christian religion, I now proceed to state the course we shall pursue as being best suited to procure a correct judgment.

In conformity with opinions already announced in a preceding page, I reiterate the belief, that the only sure argument upon which we can receive the Christian religion as a divine institution, depends upon the absolute credibility of the biblical writers. If we can prove them absolutely free from every imputation of knavery and fraud, I cannot see how their testimony can be rejected. If we can sustain our argument on this particular subject, we can afterwards strengthen ourselves impreguably by the supreme excellence of the moral doctrines they have taught, and by the fulfilment of the prophecies they have announced. Their mere historic relations may be shown confirmed more or less by Pagan antiquities, the condition of the natural and moral world may be shown entirely accordant with their statements, and thus no deficiency of argument can be imputed to the combined efforts of the several vindicators of the truth of our religious system.

Nor do I feel the least hesitation in expressing my belief, that evidence justifying an absolute and entire confidence in the credibility of the biblical writers, is to be procured to the full satisfaction of every one holding only rational doubts as to the truth of the Scripture annunciations.

But no one must require an absolute demonstration of the fact, for by the avowed scheme of Christianity itself, we are taught that every man is in a state of intellectual and moral discipline before God. Hence every man must, as a free agent, under probation, decide by his own intellectual perceptions, and by his own conscientious judgment, whether he will receive or reject the revelation thus made. No man, therefore, under the scheme of Christianity, as an intellectual moral agent, can be justified in fortifying himself in a passive incredulity, as if in a strong tower, and require that his ignorance, prejudice, and disinclination shall be taken by storm, and he be thus emphatically compelled to enter into the kingdom of God. The

blessings, whether present or future, pertaining to that kingdom, are freely offered to all who will seek for them, but they are not forced by compulsion upon those who see fit to disregard them. *Nullum remedium posuit Deus perveracitæ.* It is sufficient that the terms of admission into the heavenly kingdom are proposed to mankind, who are free to choose, free to reject—connected on the one hand with every thing desirable, and on the other, with every thing unhappy. The opportunity to choose, is put into every man's power in christendom, and the very purpose for which man has been made, is that as a free agent, he shall determine for himself his condition in eternity. If that existence be an unhappy one the fault is his own.

We have now brought the subject of our investigation, after a most deliberate examination of the circumstances by which it is surrounded, to a very simple and plain case. As Christians, we assert that the truth or the falsehood of the Christian religion depends, *first*, upon the veracity of those persons who have written the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and *secondly*, upon the integrity of text with which those writings have been preserved to this our day. These subjects we shall investigate in due order.

Our confidence in the veracity of the biblical writers does not rest upon any want of evidence that may criminate their motives; I think we are abundantly able to discern them so evidently honest, and so entirely free from the very suspicion of knavery and imposture, that we can unhesitatingly give them our entire confidence.

And this confidence can be justified by no very great amount of exposition, for it is impossible for us to entertain more than two opinions concerning those who have written the volume of Scripture. Either the authors of these books were knaves and impostors, or they were honest men who are entitled to be credited in the statements they have made. On this point there can be no embarrassment, for it is evident there can be no mean opinion between the two. The writers of the Bible must have been either wholly knaves and impostors, or wholly honest and upright.

In the ordinary transactions of human life, individuals may be at various times either honest or profligate, but in the promulgation and continuance of a remarkable system, asserted to have been instituted by God himself, and to have been sustained by a long succession of supernatural agencies, it is utterly impossible, that any order of men, proclaiming such a system, could be on that special scheme, impostors at one time, and honest, veracious men at another.

The advocates for Christianity, therefore, assert that the Bible was written by honest men, under divine influences, not only with-

out sinister motives or selfish considerations, but for the welfare and happiness of mankind.

Those who oppose the Christian religion, say it was devised by artful, cunning men, to answer selfish and corrupt purposes.

Now these two propositions most assuredly exhibit the true points of dispute concerning the value of the biblical writings, and any one anxious to discover truth, must try the question on these points alone. Other particulars involved with the general subject, may be either capable of different solutions or may be altogether incomprehensible, but not so with the two propositions above stated—there can be no intermediate opinion. But one can be true, and that, I presume, must be so absolutely.

And we can bring the subject of our examination under the scrutiny of the most severe and rigid analysis, for, from the eminent position of the Jewish priesthood in the biblical writings, they have been ever charged with all the fraud and imposture that is implicated in the Scripture writings. From the testimony of universal history, this suspicion of the Jewish priesthood was certainly justifiable previous to an examination of the biblical writings, but how any one could have made the examination and continued of that opinion, seems to me surprising. But, however the fact may be, we have never seen nor heard any imputation cast on the Bible that did not unhesitatingly ascribe it to frauds and impostures of the priesthood, and they as being the only persons ever charged with the fraud, are the individuals whose proceedings require our utmost powers of scrutiny and analysis.

That we may be the better enabled to commence our investigation of this particular subject, I shall furnish some extracts from the more eminent infidel writers, as to what they consider the leading and important features in the priestly character, so that we may want no aid in our proposed undertaking, of rightly appreciating the conduct of the Jewish priests.

Baron Holbach in various parts of his atheistical writings, speaks of priests in the follow manner: "Priests have ever shown themselves the friends of despotism and the enemies of public liberty; their trade requires abject and submissive slaves, who have never the audacity to reason. Instead of conducting the people to salvation, priests have always conducted them to servitude."

Again the same writer informs us,

"The dogmas, the ceremonies, the morals, and the virtues prescribed by every religion in the world, are visibly calculated only to extend the power, or augment the emoluments of the founders and

ministers of these religions. The ceremonies and practices procure the priests riches or respect. And the only object of all religious virtues is evidently the advantage of the ministers of religion."

Lord Bolingbroke states,

"Such is the knavery and such the folly of mankind, that no example, ancient or modern, Pagan or Christian, can be produced of a priesthood, once established, that has not aimed at acquiring from their institution, and that has not acquired, sooner or later, immoderate wealth and exorbitant power."

Hume observes,

"In all ages of the world priests have been enemies to liberty, and it is certain that this steady conduct of theirs must have been founded on fixed reasons of interest and ambition. All princes that have aimed at despotic power, have known of what importance it was to gain the established clergy. As the clergy on their part have shown a great facility in entering into the views of such princes."

It is no use to multiply further authorities from the atheists or deists on the subject of the priesthood; it must be sufficiently clear that the order is essentially charged with an inordinate desire after arbitrary power, whether temporal or spiritual, and an insatiable cupidity of wealth and its consequent enjoyment.

That such has been almost universally the character of the priesthood in the past history of mankind, is indisputable; and the exceptions are but rare in point of numbers. But, as a general observation, including the entire history of mankind, it involves the proceedings of all the knaves and impostors that have ever lived, and all the false religions promulgated by them. The observation also includes all those various corrupt practices that have taken place in the church of God during the lapse of many centuries, in some of which religion seemed almost banished from the earth. But ambition, pride, and sensuality, are not peculiar to priests; they are the predominant sins of human nature; and it is nothing singular that the priesthood should, in their corrupt proceedings, exhibit those moral aberrations that are universally discerned to take place in the common constitution of humanity.

We care not, however, how deeply corrupt and vicious the general character of the priesthood may be exhibited by the history of past time, for we shall be able to exhibit the founders of the Jewish church as far as they are involved with such particulars, so distinctly disinterested, that the darker the ground may be colored, it will only serve to make more brilliant that exhibition of truth which is the more remarkable, as being elsewhere undiscernable.

Having now settled all our leading principles, let us proceed with our investigation to ascertain the degree of credibility to which the writers of the biblical volume are entitled. And first, what is the Bible, and what is its true character?

The Bible is not, in itself, a revelation from God; it is a history of sundry revelations made by God to mankind, which men have committed to writing, and have preserved, by natural means, through successive copyists and translators to this, our time.

The Bible, taking the whole composition under this general appellation, relates that God made the world, and all things that are therein; that he placed man at the head of this creation to undergo a certain discipline or probation; but the progenitors of the human race soon fell from a happy condition into one abounding with trouble and sorrow, eventually terminating in death. In these calamitous circumstances, we, their posterity, have been involved as being born after their ejection from Paradise. In future time, when men had greatly multiplied upon the earth, and had corrupted their ways nearly altogether before God, the Bible represents Jehovah as selecting the Jewish people and placing them under the discipline of a peculiar economy, known as the institutions of Moses. This system prevailed until that certain time had arrived when Jehovah saw fit to expand the Jewish economy into the universal scheme of Christianity. Judaism and Christianity are not different in their principle or purpose, but the one was the earlier, the other the latter stage of the same single scheme. The one was the more elementary, the other the more perfect exhibition, or as St. Paul has said, the first was as a schoolmaster to teach us how we should receive the latter.

The religious system announced by the Scriptures is very plain, and as its terms are so exceedingly simple, I earnestly request the reader, if he be a sceptic, to keep them ever in remembrance; for the only real importance of the Bible is, that it announces to us the following particulars:

1st, That God has placed man as a free agent before him, to undergo probation or discipline according to the requirements of a moral law, sanctioned by him.

2d, That God has distinctly recognized a greater or less degree of inability in man to keep this law perfectly, whether as occurring through mere ignorance or through any deceitfulness of heart or intellect prevailing against his knowledge.

3d, To meet this infirmity of human nature, God has promised that though men do sin against his commands, that, nevertheless, he will pardon their transgression, and bestow his blessing on them if

they will sincerely repent of their sin, and resort to those means of expiation that he has directed the penitent to use.

Hence it is clear, that the Bible, strictly speaking, is only important to us as containing the articles of a covenant that God is stated to have made with mankind. The history of the Jewish church and nation, the prophetic writings, and the devotional and moral books, though highly interesting and important, both as furnishing us explanatory views or testimony supporting the truth of the covenant, yet, in themselves, contain no matter of essential importance beyond the confirmation or explanation they give to the truth of the COVENANT as above stated.

I cannot too earnestly request the reader to keep ever in mind the intrinsic value of the biblical writings to us, as set forth in the statements made above. If he will have this matter continually in his view, and that the sole object of our present undertaking is to ascertain the value of the testimony affirming those statements, he will always be able to preserve himself from confusion or perplexity amidst the unavoidable discussion of the numerous subjects through which we must necessarily pass, before we can sufficiently decide upon the actual credibility of the Scripture writers.

After we have decided upon the moral or personal credibility of the writers, it will be our next object to investigate the integrity of the biblical text and other critical matters, as well as to ascertain those particulars that Christianity requires from us, whether as matters of faith or practice.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE CHARACTER OF MOSES AND THE PRIESTHOOD, AS IMPLICATED IN THE CIVIL INSTITUTIONS OF THE JEWS.

WHATEVER the subject may be; whether pertaining to the common history of mankind, to that of private individuals, or to the constitution of the Jewish church or nation, that is contained in the first five books of the Scripture, rests alone upon the credibility to which the writer or writers of those books may be shown to be entitled.

The common, perhaps the universal, opinion of our day, is, that Moses is to be regarded substantially the author of the Pentateuch, however different our copies may be from the books or documents originally written or dictated by him: for it is evident, that certain particulars related in our present copies, have been added, after the death of Moses, and very probably by different persons, at different times.

The question as to the actual amount of authorship, to be ascribed to Moses in the composition of the Pentateuch, appears to me a curious, rather than an important subject. The books themselves, are not formally inscribed with his name, though many passages in them bear internal evidence of having been written by him, or by his authority. But how much, or how little, is to be ascribed to him, it is impossible for us to determine. All we shall claim at present, is, that more or less was written by Moses, whatever else may possibly have been added by Samuel, by Ezra, or by any other scribes or commentators, now forgotten or unknown.

By the preceding statement, it will be perceived, that we consider the question of authorship, rather a subject of criticism than of religion; for as a question pertaining to religion, the matter of interest, is alone, whether the statements made in the Pentateuch are true or false; let the book have been written by whom it may.

We propose, therefore, not to concern ourselves, at the present moment, with the question as to the particular authorship of the literary composition of the Pentateuch, but to ascertain, if possible, the true moral character of the writer or writers of those books that we may be enabled to judge whether the religious doctrines announced

by them in the Pentateuch, are to be received or not, for in this fact alone, does their importance consist.

In order to discuss our subject with due regard to order, we shall begin our investigation with the history of Moses, as detailed in the Bible, be it true or false, for it is evident from the Scriptures, that the institutions and history of the Jewish nation are made dependant upon a peculiar civil and religious constitution attributed to Moses. Where the system itself begins, there we naturally should commence with our analytical examination.

It was alone through the hands of Moses, that the Jewish church was constituted, and perfected in all its appointments, nothing having been added to the institutions attributed to him, in any period during the after continuance of the national church. The priests or prophets who chronologically succeeded each other in the administration of religious services, but filled the stations appointed them by Moses, or made further communications from Jehovah, as simply confirming the authority of the Mosaic constitutions. They therefore all depend on the truth of the divine mission of Moses, and the dispensation committed to him. He is the principal, the others accessories. And upon this system, established, as we believe, by Moses, arises the Christian church, the perfection of the Jewish economy, for Christ himself has said, that he came not to destroy the law of Moses, but to fulfil its scheme and purpose.

We think proper here to anticipate any captious objections that might be made as to the propriety of our commencing this investigation with the era and history of Moses, for it may possibly be asserted, that by so doing, we assume certain things not proved, as for instance, the actual existence of such a man as Moses, &c.

It can make no difference whatever to the fairness of our proposed examination, whether Moses be supposed by the reader to have really lived, or whether he be a pure fiction of the biblical writers.

It must be evident, that the author of the Pentateuch, be he whom he may, represents a real or fictitious Moses, to have been the founder of the Jewish law and economy. And hence, as the Bible ascribes the origin of the system to a particular individual, and to a particular era, we should commence our analysis with those very particulars with which the system itself begins, and not until a complete analysis and investigation of the subject has been made, ought any one to express a judgment on the matter, whether it be true, or whether it be an imposture.

Others perhaps may contend, that we are bound to prove the Scriptures true, from the beginning to the end, and therefore may

insist, that we shall first prove, to their satisfaction, the truth of the facts related, in the order they occur in the book of Genesis. Let us ask such a one what kind of proof he requires on those particulars. Is it from any inspection of natural things? Natural things can bear no testimony, whether for, or against them. Is it from the historical records or traditions of other nations? There are no historical records or traditions of other nations preserved, that can determine the controverted points. How can we prove, historically, the occurrence of events, when the sole knowledge we possess of them, is alone derived from the Scripture page.

The belief to which the early historical part of the book of Genesis may be entitled, depends therefore, entirely upon the credibility of the writer of the Pentateuch, and as the Bible itself seems to refer the composition of the Pentateuch, alike to the era, as to the authority of Moses; with him and with his era, therefore, must our analysis with all propriety commence.

According to the plan which we have proposed, we shall open this subject with a slight sketch of the personal history of Moses. In doing this we shall only exhibit the relation of the Scripture, without adding to it any of those confirmations of certain particulars which we could, in this instance, have produced from Pagan authorities.

Moses, the great legislator of the Jewish people, was born during that time when the nation was held in grievous bondage by the Egyptians, and according to the mandates of an inhuman prince, was exposed on the banks of the river Nile that he might perish. But by the contrivance of his mother, it so happened that the infant was discovered by the daughter of the Egyptian monarch. She, affected with the sight of a fine child thus exposed to die, humanely saved him from the apparent danger, had him educated under her patronage, and as we may reasonably suppose, with all the advantages attending such protection. But, notwithstanding the circumstances peculiar to the education of Moses, he appears to have regarded the people from whom he had sprung with all national predilection, for when he saw an Egyptian on some particular occasion abusing an Israelite, he slew the oppressor. Anticipating the vengeance of the monarch for this act, he fled from Egypt into the land of Midian, where he continued forty years engaged in the simple occupation of a shepherd. In the last year of this long exile, and whilst feeding his flocks near mount Horeb, he there witnessed the extraordinary appearance of a bush, blazing with fire, which, nevertheless, was not consumed. As he drew nigh to examine this phenomenon more

particularly, a voice was heard calling on him by name, announcing the presence of the God of his fathers, and informing him that Jehovah had chosen him to be the agent by which the Israelites should be delivered from their servitude in Egypt. Moses did not readily assume this commission, but suggested so many objections, that the Scriptures inform us the displeasure of Jehovah was manifested against his want of faith and confidence. But, finally, he departed on his mission, and his brother Aaron was appointed his coadjutor.

On the appearance of Moses and Aaron before the Egyptian monarch, with the command of Jehovah that he should release the Israelites, their commission was disbelieved, and their requirement disregarded. But, ultimately, in consequence of extraordinary manifestations of divine displeasure, the permission was given that the whole Jewish people, with all their property, might leave Egypt. An immense number of persons were thus suddenly put into motion, and who immediately directed their march towards the shores of the Red Sea, where the waters were miraculously divided that they might gain the opposite coast of Arabia, and escape from the hostile pursuit of their oppressive masters, who regretted that they had allowed them to leave the kingdom.

Shortly after this event, and whilst in the desert of Arabia, the peculiar system that so remarkably characterised the Jewish people, was communicated to them by Moses, and, as we are told in the Scriptures, with miraculous exhibitions of the divine approbation.

Moses presided over the Jewish nation for about forty years after this event, leading them in various directions throughout the desert until all the adults who had left Egypt should die off. This proceeding was ordered by Jehovah as a punishment for their incredulity in his promises and disobedience to his commands. When the time arrived for them to cross the river Jordan to take possession of the land of Canaan, Moses died at the age of one hundred and twenty years; he also, being excluded from entering the promised land in consequence of an offence before Jehovah at the rock Meribah.

So far only as supernatural agencies are introduced in the preceding relation of the Pentateuch, can there be any justifiable ground to dispute the statement made. There can be no exception taken as to the general fact, that the Jewish nation came out of Egypt under the conduct of Moses, and that he communicated to them a law and polity by which they became afterwards remarkable among other oriental people. Indeed on the general subject, the testimony of Pagan antiquity is sufficiently clear.

The private character of Moses as exhibited in the Scripture does

not require from us any comment, it being clear that his personal actions are unimpeachable, on the score of disinterestedness and morality, as far as they are openly related in the Pentateuch. Any moral objection made by the deists against his official proceeding, under his asserted divine commission, cannot be charged to him, who was but an instrument in the hand of Jehovah. The objection lies against Jehovah who ordered the act, unless Moses was a knave and impostor. But this is the very question we are to determine, and not until our investigation is closed can any one undertake with propriety to judge that fact. But in the mean time, the reader must bear in mind that neither the attributes of Deity, nor the morality of his acts, can possibly be brought under our scrutiny, for they are wholly incomprehensible, as we have shown in our preceding chapters.

The only manner by which we can fully appreciate the real character of Moses, will be by minutely analysing the civil and religious system that he established among the Jewish people. I apprehend, by estimating its terms, its moral influence, the amount of liberty and happiness afforded to the nation, and the privileges, honors, and emoluments that may have been secured to the ruler or to the priesthood—we shall be enabled fully to appreciate the fact whether he is to be regarded as an honest man or a knavish impostor.

Perhaps it may not be amiss to ask, what could have been Moses's views in representing himself a messenger divinely commissioned, or what could have been the view and expectation of the scribes who wrote out the Pentateuch, and attributed it to Moses as the founder of the Jewish polity?

Can any one be found so simple as to express any doubtfulness of the motives by which persons act under such high pretensions? Is it possible to hold any other opinion than that either the individuals above mentioned, conscious of their divine commission, acted under the highest influences of moral obligation; or that, as knaves and impostors, they proposed the attainment of political power, or the gratification of their sensuality, whether as individuals, or in that of the order to which they belonged.

I have thought it right to bring this simple view before the reader, as one that enables the mind more fixedly to apply itself to the one important object that he should ever keep before him in this investigation, *to wit*, the ascertaining the credibility of the authors of the Scriptures, and which can only be accomplished by trying their integrity and disinterestedness upon those subjects that have ever been

the touchstones to human virtue or vice—to human greatness or weakness.

That we may rightly comprehend the peculiarities of the Mosaic Institutions, we must divide our analysis into two parts, one of which shall exhibit the Political or Civil Constitution, and the other their Theological or Ecclesiastical Institutions.

Of the importance of this proceeding there can be no doubt, for there has been no small injury done the Christian cause, from the inattention of commentators in not formally distinguishing what were civil ordinances, and what were religious appointments in the institutions of the Jewish people.

In all other governments than the Jewish, the principles leading to civil enactments are founded alone in expediency, justice or utility, and offences against such laws, are stated in all indictments to be offences against the king or republic that governs under such system of laws.

In addition, however, to the crime implied by a breach of civil law, there is in many instances, the further imputation of a theological offence against the God or gods whom such a community may worship. Thus, murder, theft, &c., are by civil tribunals punished as offences against human society, but a further punishment, it is supposed, awaits murderers and thieves under that theory of religion, whatever it may be, that men conscientiously regard as being of divine authority. Though human offences are thus subject to two indictments, *viz.* one against man, and the other against God, there is, generally speaking, no difficulty in determining what is the province of religion, and what is the province of law.

In the Jewish theocracy, however, as depicted in the Pentateuch, there was but one head both to church and state, namely, Jehovah himself—who expressly calls the Jews his peculiar people, and whose civil institutions, if not actually directed by him, nevertheless, received his sanction. Hence, it would seem, that an offence against Jewish law, was a simple one against Jehovah, whether as king and ruler over the nation, or whether as a Deity, who required religious obedience from his creatures.

The complete solution of this subtle matter, which involves the actual distinction between religion and morality, is not necessary to our present investigation. We are enabled to ascertain from the Bible every thing essential to our purpose, by regarding the persons by whom the laws were administered among the Jewish people. A reference to the Scripture, will, therefore, enable us to determine

what matters were under the control of the magistrates, and what matters were administered by the priesthood.

Of the Civil Administration of Law under the Mosaical Institutions.

What system of law may have prevailed among the Jews whilst subjected to the Egyptians, we know not, but I presume, whatever it may have been, it was loosely administered by the elder and wiser individuals of the respective tribes, under the patriarchal form, guided by a plain, common sense view of equity and justice. Deeming the inquiry on this subject to be of little importance, we think it sufficiently confirmatory of our opinion, to state that Moses, when he descended to Egypt on his mission from Jehovah, is always represented as communicating with a body of rulers, or influential persons, who bore the appellation of *Elders of Israel*. See Exod. iv. 29., vi. 14, &c., which last seems to be an imperfect record of their names.

After the Israelites had escaped into the desert, a similar body of elders appear to have been in existence, though as not having any determinate powers assigned to them, they seem to have become comparatively unimportant, in consequence of the new laws communicated to the nation by Moses.

The next view we have of Jewish polity, represents Moses sitting alone, the judge and arbitrator of the people, not *de jure*, as far as we can learn from Scripture, but *de facto*, as might naturally occur from the peculiar light in which he would be regarded as a lawgiver, divinely commissioned. Under these circumstances it is but reasonable to suppose he would be preferred to decide the various subjects in litigation between different parties. But however this may be, Moses found himself overwhelmed with judicial business, and appears to have been unconscious how he could be relieved from the burthen until he received the suggestion of Jethro, his father-in-law, who visited Moses whilst the Jews traversed the desert of Arabia. The narration is very artless, and conveys such an important fact in the adoption of the recommendation, that we shall distinctly exhibit it to the reader. See Exodus xviii. 13, &c.

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood by Moses from the morning to the evening.

And when Moses’s father-in-law saw all that he did to the people, he said, what is this thing that thou doest to the people? Why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?

And Moses said unto his father-in-law, because the people come unto me to inquire of God.

When they have a matter, they come unto me, and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God and his laws.

And Moses's father-in-law said unto him, the thing that thou doest is not good.

Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou and this people that is with thee; for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.

Hearken now unto my voice, and I will give thee council, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward that thou mayest bring the causes unto God.

And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work they must do.

Moreover, thou shalt provide, out of all the people, able men, such as fear God; men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

And let them judge the people at all seasons, and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee; but every small matter they shall judge, so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burthen with thee," &c. &c.

With this advice of Jethro's, Moses was pleased, and brought the subject before the people for their acquiescence, as is stated in Deut. i. 9, &c., where he reminds the people of the transaction, as follows:

"And I spake unto you at that time saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone.

How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?

Take you wise men and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you.

And ye answered me and said, the thing which thou hast spoken is good for us to do.

So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes.

And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him.

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment, but ye shall hear the small as well the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's, and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.

And I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do."

By this statement it will be seen, that the judges or magistrates of the Jewish people, as appointed under the recommendation of Moses, were a very numerous body. Nor does it appear, that any limit of jurisdiction was assigned to them, nor exception of any particular crimes to be reserved for the judgment of Moses or his co-adjutors. If the judges *themselves* might consider any case so complicated, that they could not discern its merits; then, and the inference is direct *then only*, did they send it up as an appeal case for the judgment of Moses, or of the superior ruler of after time.

It would be useless for us to follow this subject into further details, the only particular of importance, is, that these judges were all laymen, unless perhaps in the Levitical tribe, for it is most probable, that the judges of each tribe were selected from their own members, and that their jurisdiction was confined to their respective tribes.

Having thus exhibited the very simple establishment of the judiciary power under the institution of Moses, we will now look at the legislative branch of government.

Moses, as he had unintentionally engrossed the judicial power, appears from the same cause to which we alluded, when on that subject, to have borne the whole burthen of directing the various matters pertaining to the general government of the people; and the weight of this charge so much oppressed him, that he complained of the unsupportable burthen to Jehovah, who directed him to organize a council of seventy persons, (perhaps seventy-two,) to assist him in the government. This body were also laymen, taken we presume, from the twelve lay tribes, in the proportion of six from each. (Numbers xi. 16, 17.)

This council, which was the model for the Sanhedrim of after times, appears to have exercised but a loose jurisdiction over the people whilst in the desert, and after the conquest of Canaan, appears to have fallen into disuse, together with all the regular machinery of government, except in such municipal regulations as particular villages or communities, chose to appoint for themselves.

We presume, we have sufficiently exhibited the features of the Jewish civil administration, so as to enable us to take some very important views as to the fact of the political honesty or knavery of Moses and his associates, or of the individuals whoever they were, that wrote the Pentateuch, and ascribed these institutions to his appointment.

The first matter in order before us, is, to consider the appointment of judges or magistrates, which is distinctly implied in the narration to have been done through an election by the whole people,* at the recommendation of Moses himself. This circumstance is certainly utterly irreconcilable with the supposition that Moses was an ambitious impostor. For though he might wish to relieve himself from the drudgery of the judgment seat, he could not be ignorant of the immense importance of keeping that tribunal under his immediate control, or that of the hierarchy, and therefore, instead of conceding the judicial power to the nation at large, through the hands of laymen, selected by themselves, it would have been his evident policy as an ambitious impostor, to have committed it to a few of his own creatures, or to have assigned it to the priesthood exclusively. But Moses does the very contrary to this, he does not commission the sacerdotal tribe, neither does he nominate any of his friends or dependants, to the exercise of this important function, but desires the whole body of the people, to make the selection themselves.

Every step of this proceeding, is contrary to what any knavish politician ought to have adopted, and as Moses was confessedly a man of abilities, it is absolutely requisite for any one considering him an impostor, to show why he acted so directly contrary to common sense state policy, in thus giving up power and authority, to the people he governed.†

The force of our preceding observation, is much greater against any theory that could suppose such a transaction to be a forgery of a knavish priesthood, for it would be the grossest of all hypothesis, to suppose, that such persons would of themselves do any thing that could infirm the exercise of their power or influence over the people, by such an institution.

Notwithstanding the relief experienced by Moses, in the preceding abstraction of judicial business, he still complains of the burthen of the government, and to remedy this matter, Jehovah is represented to have directed him to take seventy persons of the elders

*See Deut. i. 13, 14. This is also confirmed by Deut. xvi. 18, in which the election or selection of judges and officers was vested in the people.

† The Bramins acted on a very different principle than that recognized by Moses, for in the Institutes of Menu, which are supposed by Sir Wm. Jones, to have been written about the same time with the Pentateuch, it is thus stated. "Even the decision of *one priest*, if more cannot be assembled, who perfectly knows the principles of the Vedas, must be considered as law of the highest authority, not the opinion of myriads who have no sacred knowledge."

When we add to this declaration, the statement that no one but of the Braminical caste, was allowed to learn the Vedas, it will be seen that the authority of the priesthood was thus made absolute.

of Israel, and constitute them a great council to aid in the management of public affairs.

In the declaration of Moses, that he was unable to bear the weight of government alone, we hear a complaint, that no monarch has ever made before or since, though ruling over nations vastly more numerous, and with a far more perplexing system of domestic or foreign policy.* And this almost miracle of complaint, comes from a man charged with being an impostor, whose chief aim was the attainment of political power!

Yet further, this supposed priestly impostor has introduced Jehovah, to inform him, in a supernatural manner, that the proper remedy was, to institute a council, *not of priests*, but of wise laymen to share the burthen.

Where was the knavery of the Jewish priesthood when the Pentateuch was written? Who is it that can reconcile such facts, as have been stated, with the belief that such ordinances were forgeries by the priesthood, who not only omitted to intrude themselves into power by their forgery, but who represent Jehovah as directing Moses to lay the care of the government upon wise laymen alone, regardless of any willingness that the priesthood might have to share in bearing this burthen?

As it is a matter of essential importance to exhibit the actual amount of legal powers exercised by the civil magistrates among the Jews, as contradistinguished by those exercised by the priesthood, I shall extract every case and decision where reference is made in the Pentateuch, to these respective bodies of men.

Of matters to be decided by Civil Judges.

In collecting the passages of the Pentateuch in which the powers of the civil magistrate or priesthood are mentioned, the reader must be aware that such particulars are only gathered incidentally from occasional relations; for on the appointment of the judges of thousands, hundreds, &c., (Deut. i. 16, 17,) or where other magistrates were constituted, (Deut. xvi. 18, 19, 20; xxv. 1,) they were evidently empowered to decide on all civil cases whatever, and that being always understood, it is only by accident that the magistrates are mentioned in particular cases. Such passages are, therefore, very few; but just as far as they go, they not only confirm the view we

* Diocletian and Charles the 5th, abdicated the sovereignty, tired out, and disgusted with Empire; but Moses continued in the direction of the Jewish nation, having divided his authority with a large council. Such an ambition, therefore, is unparalleled in the history of mankind, and totally inconsistent with any theory of imposture.

have taken, but they are of value as showing, with distinctness, the exclusion of the priesthood from all share in the civil administration of the Jewish polity.

Quoting them in the order in which they occur, they are as follows:

The servant refusing freedom was brought before the judges, Exodus xxi. 6.

If a woman miscarried through the violent act of a man, the judges to determine the amount of damages payable, Exodus xxi. 22.

In case goods, &c. entrusted or deposited with any one, were lost, stolen, &c. the judge to determine how far he was responsible, Exod. xxii. 8, 9.

Between the homicide and revenger of blood, the congregation to decide. By congregation, I presume, is meant the townsmen of that community. But in Deut. xix. 2, where the proceeding in this same case is mentioned, the authority is attributed to the elders of the city, (i. e. the magistracy.) The words are synonymous in their bearing on the case, and possibly may be so in technical significance, Num. xxxv. 12, 24, 25.

In cases where human sagacity was unable to determine the true merits of the case, the judges were to bring the question before God, who promised a supernatural judgment. This was the consultation by Urim, and required the co-operation of the priesthood. We shall discourse on this matter presently, Deut. xvii. 8 to 13.

In case of false witness, &c. the judge to bring the matter up to God by Urim—it being one of the particulars belonging to the preceding general rule, Deut. xix. 17, 18.

A stubborn and disobedient son to be brought before elders at the gate, Deut. xxi. 18 to 21.

The case of disputed virginity, to be tried before the elders, Deut. xxii. 15, 18.

The man refusing to marry his brother's widow, to be brought before the elders, Deut. xxv. 7, 8, 9.

Of matters of civil polity under the jurisdiction of the priesthood.

The only place in the Pentateuch where the priests had any particular judgment or scrutiny, formally committed to them, other than in the direct exercise of their devotional functions, is in Leviticus xiii. xiv.—where they are made judges of the disease and cure of leprosy.

It is, therefore, undeniable, that in the Pentateuch there is no matter of Jewish civil polity, *formally* committed to the authority of

the priesthood, but to determine the presence of leprosy in men or things, and when they had again become clean. This duty is very expressly assigned to them, and if the Jewish priests were knaves and impostors, they have, in our view, most unaccountably appreciated its importance, for the word *priest*, in the discharge of this duty, is reiterated no less than in sixty-nine verses of these two chapters. It would, therefore, appear, that it was not from any dislike to write the word *priest*, that they have abstained from introducing it in other places, where we, of this day, would have judged it might have been more profitable to them.

I leave the subject, however, to the scrutiny and wisdom of the deists; but, until we are enlightened by them, it would seem to me, that the imputed knavery and ambition of the Jewish priests, was of a most anomalous kind, indeed, when they retained such a power as above stated, and excluded themselves, at least in every appearance of things, not only from exclusive rule and dominion, but even from a share in the public administration of the government.

Who then were the legislators, rulers, or judges appointed by Moses to preside over the Jewish people? Were they a privileged or noble class? Were they priests or Levites? No, they were in every particular, laymen, and such as the people themselves approved or elected. Had the priesthood any thing to do with the civil government? Nothing, as far as we can learn from the Scripture—and most undeniably, the Bible contains no one precept or recommendation, by which the priesthood could directly interfere in civil affairs. The priests held no right by the Bible, to approve or censure the officers of the government, they did not even consecrate them for their appointments, from the lowest to the highest. In short, from Moses, until after the time of any canonical writer of the Old Testament, the administration of the government was absolutely in the hands of the laity alone, excepting in those instances of dubious power, administered by Eli and the prophet Samuel, and of which we shall take notice hereafter.

Though every expression in the preceding paragraph, concerning the exclusion of the priesthood from any share in the administration of the Jewish government, is strictly correct, yet there are two passages in the Pentateuch, which a careless reader or one anxious to find a flaw in my assertion, might consider to imply that the priesthood might, at least, interfere in the determination of political subjects. This matter we deem of sufficient importance to require the trouble of removing any seeming contradiction to the conclusion we have already made.

Of the passages to which I allude, the first is, where a reference is to be made in "*hard cases*" to the priests and Levites, (Deut. xvii. 8th to 13th,) and which is technically termed the judgment by Urim and Thummim.

"If there arise a matter *too hard for thee in judgment*, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates, then thou shalt arise and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shalt choose.

And thou shalt come unto the *priests*, the *Levites*, and unto the *judge* that shall be in those days, *and inquire*, and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment.

And thou shalt do according to the sentence, &c. Thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand nor to the left.

And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the *priest*, that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the *judge*, even that man shall die, and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel." See also Deut. xix. 16, 17, 18, for a similar direction.

The second passage occurs in announcing the appointment or consecration of Joshua, as the successor of Moses. It is there observed, (Numbers xxvii. 21,) "And he (i. e. Joshua) shall stand before Eleazer, the priest, who shall ask council for him after the judgment of Urim, before the Lord; at his word shall they both go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation."

These passages are very remarkable, and as seeming to confer a great amount of power upon the priesthood, they require a full investigation of their purport and meaning.

The statement made in our first reference concerning the supernatural judgment, promised to be given in difficult cases between individuals, is simply this. Jehovah promised to give a miraculous decision in those instances when the proper judicial officers were, from the perplexity of the case, unable to decide. The case was to be first tried before the civil tribunals, and if from any perplexity of circumstances, the *civil judges could not decide its true merits*, they were then, in order to prevent any injustice by an ignorant decision, to bring the matter *not to the priesthood* for their determination, but *to Jehovah himself*, who had promised a supernatural judgment on the case.

As none but the priesthood could enter the sanctuary, this pro-

ceeding necessarily required the ministry of the priesthood, though the Bible has expressly associated the judge or civil ruler, with the high priest in the consultation.

As respects the truth of the miraculous judgment to be thus given, it is impossible for us to produce any direct evidence to show that Jehovah had actually appointed such a course of proceeding; our only mean of estimating its truth, is to ascertain in what manner this commission or trust was executed.

I know of no decision obtained by Urim, as this consultation was termed, on individual cases, unless in that concerning the inheritance of Zelophehad's daughters, and of him found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. The consultations of the princes by Urim, were of a different nature.

It being, then, apparently clear, that the priesthood never did, as far as the Bible relates things, ever attempt to arrogate any power to themselves in virtue of this consultation by Urim and Thummim. I think that we have the fairest ground to infer that it was always considered by them, to be distinctly a *miraculous judgment*, and as such the priesthood never appear to have interfered in the civil proceedings of the land, by assuming any right to hold an appellate jurisdiction.*

But the most conclusive argument on this subject is, the very remarkable fact, that the judgment by Urim had no operation on religious matters among the Jews. On all theological particulars, the Scriptures made the consciences of individuals the sole judges of truth, and never even hints at a reference of doubtful points to the priesthood. Nothing can be more remarkable than the circumstances detailed by Moses on the supposed case of a false prophet arising among the Jews, when instead of telling them to consult the priesthood or to ascertain by Urim whether he was a false prophet or not, he directs the people to await in patience until events should show his true character. These facts, therefore, I apprehend, are sufficient to prove that there could be no ecclesiastical fraud contemplated in the judgment by Urim, or else the priesthood would never have formally excepted particulars of theological importance

*It may be proper to remark, the consultations by Urim and Thummim did not continue after the erection of Solomon's Temple. Spencer thinks this circumstance characterises the displeasure of Jehovah, in the fact, of the Jews having slighted their Theocratical government by the election of kings to rule over them, as is related in 1 Sam. chap. viii. For as they refused to trust in the government of God, and chose a man to rule over them, so the Deity withdrew his supernatural assistance, and left them to the "arm of flesh," that they had chosen for themselves.

from the operation of an asserted supernatural judgment, that they might have controlled, and left such matters expressly in the power of the laity to decide on, as they might think right.

The verse empowering the high priest to give council to Joshua, as already quoted, is in substance similar to the judgment in private cases of difficult determination.

I understand by it, that, in any case where the necessity existed of a supernatural determination, Joshua, or any other judge or ruler, could procure such a judgment through the medium of the high priest, consulting as it is technically said by Urim and Thummim. That in all such cases of consultation they should rigidly abide by the judgment given, was simply an act of obedience to Jehovah who could not be slighted after the formality of asking his judgment.

That this is the only sense in which the verse is to be understood, and by no means implying the least right or authority to the priesthood to dictate or order any political measure, is evident from the whole history of the Scripture, which, in this instance, must be admitted irrefragable testimony; for if the institutions of the Mosaic covenant be the work of priestly imposture, the Scripture history as a running practical commentary, must exhibit how the principles of the knavish contrivance worked on the government or the people.

If it be evident that the institution was never used but on occasions alone required by the civil ruler as assistance to his infirmity of judgment, it shows distinctly that we have rightly estimated the nature of the institution.

Now in every instance that we can examine in the Scripture, it is undeniable, that not in one single case, have the priesthood ever come forward, as if from Jehovah, claiming any authority to direct the ruler, or government, or people as to any political measure whatever. But, on the contrary, every statement made, whether direct or indirect, exhibits the priesthood entirely under the jurisdiction of the civil magistrate. It, therefore, seems to follow conclusively, that the judgments by Urim and Thummim were not ordained for any selfish purpose of the priesthood, but were really founded in a belief that divine judgments would be given to men, unable of themselves to discern the truth or the proper method by which they should accomplish their enterprises.

However, to vindicate the explanation we have given of this matter, we shall introduce some of those facts related in the Scripture, concerning Joshua's administration of the government, which will, I trust, sufficiently confirm the correctness of our view.

The very first verse of the book of Joshua shows that the judg-

ment by Urim and Thummim was only to be used contingently under those circumstances where the ruler was called on to act and knew not the proper course he should pursue. For, without any intervention of the priesthood, it is explicitly stated, "the Lord *spake* unto Joshua, the son of Nun, saying, 'Moses, my servant, is dead; now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them,' " &c.

It may be said that the passage above quoted is not sufficiently determinate as to the fact that Jehovah directly communicated with Joshua, for this command might really have come through the medium of the high priest. But to this I reply, that whatever the fact may have been, the author of the book of Joshua has, according to the letter of Scripture, plainly stated that Jehovah did really and directly speak to Joshua without any medium of the priesthood. I, therefore, consider it alone reasonable to attach that meaning to the words in question which is their direct signification.

The fact, however, is sufficiently illustrated by the ensuing passages of the book of Joshua; and what is still more to the establishment of our views on the general matter of inquiry, is, the very distinct exhibition that instead of Joshua being under any direction of the priesthood, he expressly directs and commands them as to what they shall do.

Thus the very next passage where the priests are mentioned is in chapter iii. 7 and 8. There Joshua distinctly issues his commands to the people and the priests.

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, this day will I begin to *magnify thee* in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee."

"*And thou shalt command the priests* that bear the ark of the covenant, *saying, when ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan ye shall stand still in Jordan,*" &c.

Again, in Joshua iv. 15, 16, 17, it is said,

"And the Lord spoke unto Joshua saying, *command the priests* that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. Joshua, therefore, *commanded* the priests, saying, *come ye up out of Jordan,*" &c.

But in the fifth chapter of Joshua it is most clear that the divine communication was made directly to Joshua, and without any intervention whatever, of the high priest, it being there stated unequivocally, that an angel of Jehovah appeared to him, and directed him how to assail Jericho. And from this communication Joshua proceeds, in chap. vi. 6, to direct the service the priests should render.

"And Joshua, the son of Nun, *called the priests*, and said unto them *take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets before the ark of the Lord,*" &c.

Hence, if there is any signification in words, their import is direct that not only is Jehovah represented to have communicated with Joshua without any intervention of the priesthood, but that he, the civil ruler, is represented as commanding the priests what they should do. A statement that involves, in downright absurdity, the supposition that any knavish contrivance has been contemplated in the appointment of judgment by Urim and Thummim, or, that the book of Joshua has been written by a knavish priest; for it seems to be impossible but that the direct sense of the words is what the writer of the book of Joshua intended they should express. If he had not this intention, he would not have expressed them directly opposite to what a knavish priesthood must have desired to represent things. And they surely would never have subjected themselves by an act of their own fraud to the rule and government of the civil magistrate.

It will not be amiss to annex to the subjects of this chapter a few leading observations upon the civil government of the Jews after the time of Joshua, who completed the establishment of the Jewish nation in the land of Canaan, under all the appointments and institutions of Moses.

Such a view will not only enable us to determine fully upon the non-influence of the priesthood in civil affairs, but it will answer the additional purpose of exhibiting that none of the arts of king-craft can be charged to the biblical writers, or to the system of things distinctly advocated by them.

After the settlement of the Jewish people in the land of Canaan, the Bible does not inform us that there was any general government established over the nation. The different tribes seem to have been kept together by the bond of their common descent, though they appear to have governed themselves rather municipally than by any federal system.

That the several tribes of the Jewish nation held together by a very weak principle of federation, seems evident in the fact that particular tribes were engaged in war with foreign nations, while the other tribes were at peace. At times they also fought with each other as is related in the history of Jephtha.

From the time of Joshua to that of king Saul, or a period of almost five hundred years, the Israelites lived under a perfect democracy, or as it is expressed in the book of Judges, "There was no king in Israel in those days, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

But, during this condition of things, the Jewish people, in consequence of their idolatry and irreligion, were punished by Jehovah in his permitting them to be subjugated by the Ammonites, Philistines, &c. From this enslaved condition they were delivered, through the agency of certain individuals distinguished by the title of JUDGES, who exercised a function approaching nearer to that of the Dictator of the early history of Rome, than any other of which we are aware. These Judges were of any tribe, and indeed may be considered, simply, as persons who had become eminent by their actions in the tribe or nation, whether as arising from immediate providential commissions from Jehovah, or from personal merit. As such, they naturally obtained the respect and consideration of the nation, but without any formal delegation to them of power or sovereignty. A kingly power was offered to Gideon and his family, but it was refused by him with all disinterestedness.

Ultimately, however, the Jews insisted upon having a king to rule over them, that they might be like the nations round them, and the history of the transactions which elevated Saul to the throne are so remarkable, that the reader should consider them with the utmost attention.

The Bible informs us that the prophet Samuel, who was by birth one of the singers of the Levitical body, had judged Israel, to their entire satisfaction, until advanced in life. At this time his two sons, to whom certain powers had been entrusted, abused their commissions to such a degree, that the elders of Israel, anticipating the further misconduct of the young men, came to Samuel, and said unto him, (1 Samuel, viii.) "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord.

And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me that I should not reign over them.*

* There is certainly something lost from the text of 1 Samuel, anterior to the eighth chapter, which considerably affects our clear apprehension of the true history of this transaction. This matter, however, can be appreciated from after passages of this book, which explains with sufficient distinctness the peculiar condition of things which influenced the Jews to ask for a king, and for which no adequate motive is assigned in the first five verses of the eighth chapter.

We shall understand the whole subject by considering the scope of the speech made by Samuel to the Jews, related in chapter xii. and which I shall condense paraphrastically. In substance it is as follows:

"And Samuel said, Behold I have hearkened unto you, and I have made a king over you. But it was not a king; *it was Jehovah*, who advanced Moses

According to all the works which they have done, since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

Now, therefore, hearken unto their voice; howbeit, yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king.

And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen, and some shall run before his chariots.

And he will appoint him captains over thousands and captains over fifties, and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war and instruments of his chariots.

And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

and Aaron, who delivered your fathers from the bondage of Egypt and established them in this land. And when your fathers disobeyed Jehovah, he permitted them to be subdued and enslaved by Sisera, by the Philistines, Moabites," &c.

"And again, *it was Jehovah* (i. e. it was not a king) who delivered you from the subjection of your enemies; for it was *Jehovah* who enabled Jerrubbaal, Bedan, Jephtha, and myself, to deliver you, and who established you in peace once more in your own land."

Now comes the particular statement which I have alluded to above, which explains, not only why the Israelites desired to have a king at that particular time, but, also, why their petition to Samuel was so offensive. He remarks, in connexion with the preceding paragraph,

"But though *Jehovah* has thus always protected you when you were obedient to his commands, and who has always delivered you when you repented of your transgressions, nevertheless, you now mistrust his almighty power and providence, for when Nahash and the Ammonites came up against you, instead of seeking deliverance from *Jehovah*, you have sought it through the instrumentality of a king, (i. e. a man,) when *Jehovah himself* was to be considered your king!

"Now, therefore, behold your king; and, though you have substantially rejected that particular national providence with which Jehovah has always distinguished you, yet, nevertheless, he will not forsake you in your folly, nor your king either, if you will only keep his commandments in future," &c.

"But, that you may see that you have, in truth, rejected the Creator of all things, by choosing a king instead of confiding in that providence that has been so often manifested to you, behold, it shall thunder from the heavens, although this be not the season for such phenomena, that you may perceive how foolishly you have acted," &c.

A further correction is also requisite in the Scripture text concerning this transaction, by making the xii. chapter to precede the xi. of 1 Samuel.

And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants.

And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

He will take the tenth of your sheep, and ye shall be his servants.

And he shall cry out in that day because of your king, which ye shall have chosen you, and the Lord will not hear you in that day."

But, notwithstanding this fearful array of consequences, the people persisted in having a king, which was at last bestowed upon them in the person of Saul.

Our object in making the preceding extract, has been to show that as the Bible opposed the establishment of regal authority among the Jews in the most unequivocal manner, therefore, there can be no charge against the priests or the biblical writers, of being leagued with ambitious princes in any conspiracy against the liberties of the nation. If the Bible was originally written by knavish priests, this fact constitutes a singular anomaly in the history of the order; for in every other history, we see the undoubted fact exhibited of the necessity of kings and priests to unite in mutual support. Nor has this necessity been the result of modern experience; but the principle is distinctly recognised in every system of ancient government, and is formally avowed in writings as old perhaps as the days of Moses.*

As it would answer no important end to exhibit the future condition of the Jewish monarchy, we shall here terminate our view of that subject, satisfied that we have sufficiently shown to every unprejudiced reader, that the theory of the Jewish government, as established under the authority of Moses. and as it continued for near five hundred years afterwards, was the simplest form of democracy that the world has ever seen. And so far were the writers of Scripture from being favorable to the establishment of monarchy, that it most unequivocally asserts that Jehovah himself protested, through the prophet Samuel, against the alteration of their ancient democratical constitution, when the people obstinately determined to choose a king.

*Thus in the Institutes of Menu (Sir Wm. Jones's Works, vol. vii.) the following passages are express in their import.

"A king, even though a child, must not be treated lightly, from an idea that he is a mere mortal; no, he is a powerful divinity, who appears in human shape.

"Never to recede from combat, to protect the people and to honor the priests, is the highest duty of kings, and insures their felicity.

"The military class cannot prosper without the sacerdotal—nor can the sacerdotal be raised without the military; both classes, by cordial union, are exalted in this world and the next."

It is impossible for us to go into any special analysis of the particular laws, and various municipal regulations established under the authority of Moses, as such an exhibition would too largely augment the bulk of our Essay. The reader, curious on that subject, and every intellectual man ought to be so, must refer to the commentaries of Michælis and others, who have written specially on such particulars.

All we can do in this matter is to exhibit the leading principles of the laws and regulations established by Moses, so that any one may determine whether they be not, in every way, constituted to oppose the attempts of any person aiming at the subversion of the liberties or happiness of the people.

According to the Mosaic economy, the following principles are most distinctly recognized:

1st. That no individuals of the nation were distinguished by any superiority of rank or privileges, but were all regarded as alike equals in the eye of the law, whether as respected its promised blessings or as obnoxious to its penalties. The division of the land among them (Numbers xxvi. 52 a 57) must exhibit this matter clearly without the necessity of further references.

2d. The whole people were required to regard each other as brothers, and as such, were to assist each other, without any compensation whatever, for so doing. Hence usury of every kind was prohibited among them, (Exod. xxii. 25, Levit. xv. 36, 37,) though they were unrestricted on this point in dealing with foreigners.

3d. The greatest care was taken to prevent individuals from becoming too wealthy and powerful, by the enactment of the law of release or restoration in the year of the Jubilee, (Levit. xxv. 13, &c., 25, &c.,) which as it prohibited any absolute alienation of the possessions of families, would necessarily prevent the accumulation of property in the hands of the wealthy and powerful.

4th. And that every one might be fully informed of his rights and that of others, the laws were all made public, they were put into every one's hand that chose to copy them, and to cover any ignorance or inability of the poor, it was made the duty of the priests to read them on the great septennial festivals to the people. See Deut. xxxi. 9 to 14.

I have said nothing concerning the admirable equity, humanity, and morality that is involved in every precept and enactment of the Mosaical institutions, as that subject does not properly fall under the plan of our argumentative proceeding. We have alone attempted to exhibit those laws which involved the personal rights and liberties

of the people; for such laws exhibit the precise nature of the government, and enables us to decide whether its administration was devised for the benefit of the people, or for that of those who governed them.

Yet as there are so many persons entirely ignorant of all the facts involved in the civil government of the Jews, they cannot appreciate either the truth or the value of those moral features, so discernable to every unprejudiced student of the Mosaic writings. Though I cannot pretend to instruct such persons at the present time, I appeal to their own honesty and good sense on this subject by alone quoting those laws that regarded strangers or foreigners sojourning in the land of Israel. If such provision, for the interests and security of strangers, was made by the law of *Moses*, it must be deemed, surely, a sufficient guarantee that the welfare and happiness of their own citizens was not less sedulously regarded.*

It is a great disadvantage to our argument, that a complete exhibition and analysis of the institutions of Moses requires too long a discourse for the scope of our present investigation. Such a view would more completely demonstrate the absolute democracy of the legislation, and which conviction would abundantly prove that neither Moses nor his associates were governed by selfish or ambitious views. For when he had the opportunity to construct a new government, and actually possessed the power and influence to establish one characterized by such singular features, it must be evident that if he was an impostor, he would have established an arbitrary form of government, and not a democracy.† And upon this subject he

* "Ye shall have one manner of law as well for the stranger as for one of your own country, for I am the Lord your God. Exodus xii. 49; Levit. xxiv. 22.

"Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Exodus xxii. 21; xxiii. 9.

"And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.

"But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as *thyself*, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt, &c. Levit. xix. 33, 34.

"One law and one manner shall be for you and for the stranger that sojourneth with you." Numbers xv. 14, 15, 16.

We could add many other similar passages, but it is presumed the above will be sufficient.

† The observation that Hume has made in his speculation upon the ultimate condition of the British Government, (*Essay* v.) is equally applicable to all other human governments. He there observes, "If any single person acquire power enough to take our constitution to pieces, and put it up anew, he is really an absolute monarch; and we have already had an instance of this kind, sufficient to convince us that *such a person will never resign his power or establish any free government.*"

This observation is sufficiently striking, and in the fact that Moses had this power, and did establish a free government, we have an instance of political virtue that the world cannot parallel.

could neither want information nor encouragement, he himself having been brought up in Pharaoh's court until he was forty years of age, and the Jewish people, on their part, being ignorant of any other than a monarchical government, strengthened and vindicated by a powerful ecclesiastical establishment.

But, notwithstanding every disadvantage that we have to submit to on this subject, we have established, I trust, a sufficient number of facts that render the Mosaical institutions, thus far altogether free from any imputation of imposture, whether by the hands of civilians or ecclesiastics.

For no knavish politician would desire to constitute a people, without government, into a democracy; he would evidently aim at a monarchy.

And no knavish priest would exclude himself or his order from all participation in the management of government. History informs us of nothing more frequently attempted by the clergy than to attain political power; and if this be the fact as applicable to the order through the mere weakness and infirmity of human nature, how preposterous must it be to suppose that the Jewish priests, if knaves and impostors, should distinctly and formally exclude themselves from the exercise of political power by their own deliberate acts.

The Jewish civil institutions, therefore, as promulgated by Moses, are entirely free from all imputation of selfishness or imposture, whether his character, or that of his confidential associates be assailed. And not only is the character of Moses and his coadjutors vindicated by our scrutiny, but it claims the admission of honesty and integrity to all those who administered the same establishment in after times, so far as the Scripture writings are concerned; for it is our present copies that we have analysed, and found free from all imputation of being the work of dishonest or unjust men.

As the term democracy as applied by me in the preceding pages of this chapter to the Jewish state may be misunderstood and may be misapplied, in order to prevent any such perversion, I beg leave to make the following comment.

In terming the constitution of the Jewish people a democracy, it is strictly so if the Pentateuch be, according to infidel notions, a human fabrication. But if that book be of divine dictation, as we contend, then the Jewish government was a theocracy, i. e. under the government of the Deity, for he gave his sanction to the laws of Moses, and forbade any thing to be added to, or diminished from that code, and assumed a providential direction of their national af-

fairs. Hence the Jewish government was one *sui generis*, and unlike any other.

The commendation of the Scripture is not given to any one form of government more than another. It only tacitly requires that every form shall be administered with justice and philanthropy, or as may be summed up in one phrase, *with uprightness both in the sight of God and man*,

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF MOSES AND THE PRIESTHOOD, AS IMPLICATED IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL CONSTITUTION OF THE JEWISH NATION.

It was the theory of the Jewish church, that Jehovah, in an especial manner, was to be regarded as being present at their appointed place of worship, and that there he was to be sought by men for pardon, or for blessings, through repentance, prayer, and sacrifice. But as Jehovah did not see fit to communicate directly with individuals, approaching the sanctuary in their religious services, he ordained the rites and ceremonies of his worship, to be administered through the agency of a priesthood, who were thus represented to stand as mediators for men with the Deity, when they penitently acknowledged their transgressions against his commandments.

As to the reasonableness of such a scheme, it must be evident we can determine nothing, because it avowedly proceeds from God, whose purposes or attributes we have, in our former pages, proved to be altogether incomprehensible, and therefore inscrutable. Whether we shall believe or reject the asserted divine constitution of the Jewish church, therefore, depends alone upon the clear establishment of the integrity or knavery of the human beings, concerned in promulgating or in administering the system among men. Upon this matter we can determine with just judgment, though we cannot speculate upon the nature, attributes, and purposes of God, for of them we have no real or absolute knowledge.

If the religious doctrines announced in the Pentateuch be of divine institution, it is an essential particular connected with them, that there should be a body of priests to administer them according to its particular appointments. Hence, there is a necessity, that not only all matters pertaining to their ecclesiastical function, should be distinctly expressed in the Scriptures, but also, whatever might relate to their necessities as human beings, subject to the common infirmities of human nature. Shelter, food, and raiment, must be provided for them, somehow, or they cease to be human beings. The Deity did not relieve the Jewish priesthood either from spiritual or bodily infirmity; as such, they are always considered in the Scriptures, and consistently therewith, they must live and be supported like other men.

This simple exposition, however self-evident it may seem to many persons, is by no means unimportant. The habitual mistrust of most persons sceptically inclined, is so great upon every matter connected with the establishment of the Jewish priesthood, that it is necessary continually to make an appeal to common sense, that such persons, when of candid tempers, may recollect themselves a little, and not assume as sound objections matters that are in themselves ridiculous. Thus every provision made for the necessities of the Jewish priesthood, has been, by some persons, set down as *prima facie* evidence against their integrity, and their advocates have been called upon to vindicate them from the charge of fraud and imposture, because they required food, raiment, and houses to live in. Surely nothing can be more absurd than such objections.

But with every admission of the human necessities of the priesthood, the subject of their provisionary establishment must be subjected to the strictest scrutiny; for the mode, the kind, and the extent of their temporal appointments, certainly constitutes one of the most important means by which their true character can be most accurately discerned. All that we require, is, that the mere fact of provision having been made for the support of the priesthood, as human beings, shall not be considered an objection requiring us to vindicate them from a charge of knavery and imposture.

In the selection of the tribe of Levi, as the administrators of sacred things in the economy of the Jewish people, no motive has been assigned why that tribe was chosen rather than any other tribe. There is no reason to suppose that the tribe of Levi had been especially engaged in religious services, prior to the exodus. The Bible does not inform us that they were in any particular better than their brethren, nor was there any political importance in the tribe, it being the very smallest of the whole nation. We, therefore, can see no reason, either in a moral or political point of view, why they were selected for ecclesiastical purposes. But so it was, Jehovah ordered this tribe to be set apart for religious services, under an ordinance that they should be to him a sanctified body, in lieu of the first born of the whole Jewish people; as is stated in Numbers iii. 12, 13.

Out of the body of Levites, the family of Aaron was selected to perform the particular function of priests, for no apparent reason that we can discern, and certainly from nothing stated in the Scriptures as to their greater piety or excellence. Indeed, so far is the Bible from attributing to them any thing of that kind, that it relates that Aaron himself, his sons of mature age, together with the whole body of priests and Levites of the first consecration, died in the de-

serts for their sins, as did all other individuals of the nation with the exception of two persons. In consequence of the many transgressions of the Jews, it was expressly denounced by God that none of those individuals over twenty years of age, that came out of Egypt with Moses, should enter the promised land, except Joshua and Caleb, who were both *laymen*; see Num. xxvi. 63, 64, 65.

As the Jewish nation were very remarkable in their ecclesiastical appointments, and as their religious system has ever been considered by the deists, as the essence of the imposture instituted by Moses and Aaron, it may be naturally anticipated that if those two individuals, or their successors, were knaves and impostors, we shall most likely find selfish and artful enactments, promulgated in the construction of their ecclesiastical establishment. And as the very supposition of imposture implies selfishness, it will be impossible for us to consider them to have been knaves and rogues, if we find this portion of the Mosaic institutions, absolutely free from any liability to such an imputation.

It must be evident to every one, whether Christian or deist, that the real views and motives of a knavish priesthood, may have been concealed or disguised, while they promulgated every other part of the Jewish dispensation. But it is impossible, when they treat on their own personal honor and subsistence, if they were impostors, but that they should secure, or attempt to secure, as great an amount of power, wealth, and influence, as they could conveniently grasp. In this manner have all the priests of Paganism acted, and in this manner have all the priests of corrupted Judaism or Christianity proceeded, so that we have an uniformity of conduct in the proceedings of either impostors or irreligious priests, that renders it almost impossible we can err in appreciating the character of those priests, who have acted directly contrary to the otherwise universal mode of proceeding.

Regulating the course of our investigation by these principles, we shall forbear to make any exposition of the various sacrifices, rites, and ceremonies, pertaining to the mere priestly functions, but shall, for evident reasons, confine ourselves to those particulars that concerned the priesthood, personally, as contradistinguished from the laity.

That we may fully investigate this subject, we shall scrutinize it according to the three following divisions:

1. Of the subsistence of the Jewish priesthood.
2. Of their dignities, honors, and privileges.
3. Of their influence in the nation, or rather the amount of influence they were entitled to claim from the Pentateuch.

In the first place. The provision made for the subsistence of the Levitical tribe and priesthood, was, that the lay tribes should, from the spoils of the subjugated Canaanites, give them certain villages for a residence, and annually a tenth, or tithe, of their individual yearly produce, together with certain portions of the animals sacrificed to Jehovah.

Now, to make a naked statement such as this, and as the deists have always done, and then pass over the subject without any examination or honest commentary, is not only a *suppresio veri*, but it is maliciously to represent one of the most remarkable evidences of the divine constitution of the Jewish Church, as if it were the sordid contrivance of an interested priesthood.

Let us, then, make an honest exhibition of this matter. When the conquered land of Canaan was divided among the people of the several Jewish tribes, the tribe of Levi, or whole ecclesiastical body, by the command of Jehovah, were *expressly forbidden* to receive any portion of that land beyond the habitations which were allotted to them in the territories given to the other tribes. And so formally was this prohibitory commandment of Jehovah made, that it is, in its enactment and reiteration, repeated no less than *nine times* in the Scripture relation, before the actual division of the land was completed by Joshua.*

Now, by all principles of human equity, the tribe of Levi was as fairly entitled to a portion of the land as any other of the tribes. And if their portion in equity was merged and divided among the other tribes, nothing could be more reasonable than that the lay tribes should give them something equivalent. The tithe, therefore, was but an equivalent given by the people to the priesthood, for the use and possession of that portion of the land to which the Levitical tribe was entitled in equity.

But what ideas of common sense, much less of policy, could the framers of such a system have possessed, if they were knaves and impostors, whose aim was to domineer over the laity, and riot on the product of their labors. What imaginable perversion of reason could it have been, that induced ecclesiastical knaves and impostors, by acts asserted to be under divine sanction, obligatory on themselves and their successors, to renounce for ever their equitable claim to a portion of the land, and to trust, for the future subsistence of themselves and their families, only to the religious regard and good

* Numbers xviii. 20, also 24; Deut. x. 9; xii. 12; xiv. 27, 29; xviii. 1, 2. Joshua xiii. 14, 33; xiv. 3; xviii. 7.

will of a lay population. For, be it known, this supposed knavish priesthood have omitted to introduce, any where throughout the whole Bible, a single law, penalty, or denunciation, against any one that did not pay their tithes. The whole amount of precept and recommendation to the laity on this subject, throughout the whole Bible, is contained in the two following verses, unsupported by any sanction whatever.

“Take heed to thyself, that thou forsake not the Levite, as long as thou livest upon the earth.” (Deut. xii. 19.)

“And the Levite that is within thy gates, thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee.” (Deut. xiv. 27.)

Now, can any one, in the possession of his senses, say there could be any fraud contemplated in the tithe system of the Jewish priesthood? Is it not, in every particular, directly contrary to every maxim of worldly prudence and wisdom? Had Moses and Aaron been impostors, surely their evident policy would have been to exalt the Levitical tribe, and make them entirely independent of the laity, in the enjoyment of substantial possessions. Such a proceeding would naturally have been agreeable to the Levites, and would have enabled Moses and Aaron to have anticipated a strong *esprit du corps*, so essentially important to their remarkable government, had it been founded in fraud and imposture. On the contrary, Moses expressly denies to them every thing substantial, to which they were actually entitled in all equity, and, under the avowed sanction of Jehovah, ordains that the Levitical tribe should be for ever dependant for the necessities of life, not upon him, or the government, but upon the good opinion of the laity alone in their individual consciences. By such an act, Moses disclaimed, both for himself and any future executive officer, any exertion of undue influence upon a body of men, whom he might have otherwise cherished into a strong body of self-interested partizans.

Now, the prohibition of the Levites from the accumulation and enjoyment of temporal possessions, and making them for ever dependant upon the people at large for all the means of their subsistence, could not, under any possible view of the case, have been either gratifying to the Levites, or recommendatory of Moses and Aaron in their sight. And yet, as if the policy of these lawgivers was not sufficiently opposite to all our notions of worldly prudence and sagacity, it was enacted, (Numb. xviii. 26, 28, &c.) that one part of the subsistence of the actual priesthood should be derived from a tithe, to be contributed by the Levites!*

* “All government,” observes Hume, very justly, (*Essay on the First Princi-*

Truly, the Levites that sustained Moses and Aaron in the construction of the Jewish government, were an incomprehensible body of impostors, not only in supporting such a system originally, but in never having interpolated better things for themselves, in an after age. This is one proof, at least, that our copies of the Pentateuch do not differ substantially from the original writings.

We proceed, now, to the consideration of our second division, that proposed to scrutinize the dignities, honors, and privileges, possessed by the Jewish priesthood, as appointed by Moses.

This subject, in its affirmative position, is very soon expressed; for in no part of the Bible is it stated that the priesthood were entitled to any dignity or honor whatsoever, unless in the orders established among themselves, as to their particular functions and religious duties. But, as contradistinguished from the laity, they enjoyed neither distinction nor privilege, as recognized by any enactment of the Scriptures.

And, finally, to speak of our third division, concerning the amount of influence they were entitled to claim by the Pentateuch.—We shall, as briefly as in the preceding instance, dispose of this subject. Not only is the Scripture entirely silent as to any direct or implied right, by which the priesthood could interfere with civil affairs, but it most distinctly exhibits them to have been altogether subordinate to the civil magistrate. And the relation of their future history, abundantly distinguishes them in the universal history of priesthood, by the fact of never having even attempted to arrogate to themselves any civil authority, whether as individuals, or in a combination of the order.

Although we have exhibited an astonishing amount of testimony, in favor of the disinterestedness and religious integrity of the founders of the Jewish church, and their assistant priesthood, yet I fear the facts stated will not be appreciated in their inestimable value, unless the reader be well acquainted with the general history of Paganism, the corruptions that have been introduced into Christianity, and at the same time, has a digested view of the numerous particulars pertaining to the Jewish ecclesiastical institutions. And how few persons are there in Christendom that are thus qualified?

ples of Government), “is founded only on opinion; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular. The Soldan of Egypt, or the Emperor of Rome, might drive his harmless subjects, like brute beasts, against their sentiments and inclination. But he must, at least, have led his *mamalukes* or *prætorian bands*, like men, by their opinion.”

Let us ask, what was it that gave Moses his controlling influence over the minds of the Levitical tribe? Their *opinion*, at least, cannot be traced, like that of the *mamalukes* or *prætorian soldiers*, to any worldly or temporal interest?

Therefore, in order to make a more distinct exhibition of the important testimony we have already produced, I deem it proper to urge this subject more directly to the understanding of every honest sceptic, by enumerating certain important legal enactments which the Jewish priesthood have foreborne to make, as contrasted with what common sense should have dictated to them, had they been knaves and impostors.

As respects the tithe system of the Jewish economy, we have already shown how utterly inconsistent it was that knaves and impostors should have debarred themselves the privilege of holding real estate, and make themselves absolutely dependant upon the laity for their actual subsistence.

But this simple fact is not the only evidence we can bring forward on this point, for every portion of Jewish ecclesiastical history, in its long continuance, gives intensity to our argument, in the fact that neither in the Pentateuch, nor in any other book of Scripture, is there a passage which contains any law or denunciation against those persons that might refuse or neglect to pay their tithes.

Nor in any of the numerous recorded judgments of God upon the Jewish nation, is it ever insinuated that the non-payment of tithes was one of the sins of that people.

And to show conclusively how little the subject employed the thoughts of the composers or compilers of the biblical writings, the word tithes is not mentioned in the Scripture after the establishment of the Jews in Canaan, B. C. 1602, until the reign of Hezekiah, B. C. 725, or during a period of above eight hundred years, and then only as a particular incident in a general narration. From that time unto the conclusion of the Old Testament writings, the subject is not mentioned until after the return from the Babylonian captivity, B. C. 444, when, in the restoration of the Jewish people, it became necessary to speak to them concerning this institution of their peculiar economy, and to censure them for not having performed their duty in that particular. But, at the same time be it remembered, the priests are severely censured for their misconduct. *Malachi*, ii. 1 to 4, 7 to 10.

Not only have the Jewish priesthood divested themselves of any right to interfere in the political institutions of their country; not only have they omitted to state that they were entitled to honor and dignity in virtue of their ecclesiastical functions, but by an equally extraordinary omission, they have not claimed for their order the least privilege by the laws, or the least immunity from the laws.

Thus, for instance, the persons of the priesthood are not protected by a single law or denunciation; nor is there any provision what-

ever made against the possibility of any one treating them contumeliously, or wounding, or even killing them. The only protection they had was the common law of the land, but which made no distinction whatever between an offence or injury offered to a priest, or to the meanest commoner of the nation.*

And highly as the privilege of affording asylum to criminals, or penitents, has been valued by other priesthoods, it was prohibited to those of the Jews. Under the avowed authority of Jehovah it was enacted, that the murderer should be delivered to the magistrate to be put to death, though he might have laid hold of the very projections of the altar.

Nor must I, by any means, omit to state, that though the laity might regard the Jewish priests with reverence in virtue of their sacred functions; yet by every principle characterizing the obligations of the Mosaic economy, they were debarred from exerting any undue moral influence over the religiously inclined laity, by the introduction of special enactments of the most singular import, and which nothing but the very essence of folly, can suppose ever emanated from an imposture of priestly contrivance.

This matter will be sufficiently evident in the following exposition, thus:

In the first place, the priesthood had no esoteric doctrine; that is, they had no doctrine concealed from the people at large, and which alone was to be communicated to devotees or others initiated into any particular society of believers. Whatever the doctrine was, it was proclaimed to the whole nation without any reservation whatever; nay, it was made the duty of the priesthood, that they should read all the law publicly to the people in the year of the release, under the following circumstances:

"Gather the people together, men and women, and children, and

* How much more careful of themselves the Bramins of India were at this very same chronological epoch, let the following extracts declare:

"He who says hush, or pish, to a Bramin, or thou to a superior, must immediately bathe, eat nothing for the rest of the day, and appease him by clasping his feet with respectful salutation.

"For striking a Bramin even with a blade of grass, or tying him by the neck with a cloth, or overpowering him in argument, and adding contemptuous words, the offender must soothe him by falling prostrate.

"An assaulter of a Bramin, with intent to kill, shall remain in hell a hundred years; for actually striking him, with the like intention, a thousand.

"As many small pellets of dust as the blood of a Bramin collects on the ground, for so many thousand years must the shedder of that blood be tormented in hell.

"No greater crime is known on earth than slaying a Bramin, and the king, therefore, must not even form in his mind an idea of killing a priest." Institutes of Menu, Sir W. Jones's Works, vii.

thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of his law.

And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear and learn." Deut. xxxi. 9 to 14.

In the next place, the law itself was declared, by Moses, to be so plain and simple that it required no interpretation whatever.* This extraordinary annunciation, the direct contrary to what knavish priests have ever permitted, much less ever desired to establish as a divine appointment, is recorded in *Deut.* xxx. 11 to 14, and is the conclusion of Moses's address to the people, urging their faithful obedience to the whole law.

"For this commandment that I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.

It is not in heaven that thou shouldest say, who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us that we may hear it and do it?

Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, who shall go over the sea for us and bring it unto us that we may hear and do it?

But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

See I have set before you, this day, life and good, and death and evil."

This exhortation of Moses, therefore, as being addressed to the whole nation then assembled before him, when put into the idiom of our own language is this: The law which has thus been proclaimed to you is so very plain and simple in all its terms and enactments, that every one among you can comprehend its obligations. It is not a law that requires any one different or superior to yourselves to come and explain it; but every individual (of sufficient age) can understand it for yourselves. And in your individual obedience or disobedience you shall be judged either for good or evil, for life or death.

And, consistently with this annunciation, the case is not even supposed in the Pentateuch, that any one could be at a loss concerning the purport of the Jewish religious ordinances. Hence there is no direction to the people to seek instruction from the priesthood, neither is any authority whatever given to the priesthood in a single passage of the Scripture, empowering them to determine cases of

* The Bramins not only absolutely prohibited the common people from reading the Vedas, but even those who were permitted could not peruse the volume without their express permission. Thus it is said in the Institutes of Menu: "He who shall acquire knowledge of the Veda without the assent of his preceptor, incurs the guilt of stealing the Scripture, and shall sink to the region of torment."

conscience, or points of religious doctrine. This is a very remarkable matter to ponder on, for provision was made by Jehovah for a supernatural judgment, by Urim, in civil trials, when the particular merits of the case could not be discerned by human sagacity. The inference on this point, therefore, is important beyond estimate; for it is utterly absurd and incredible, that ecclesiastical knaves and impostors, should have recognized the supernatural judgment of God on civil cases of difficult solution, and yet should exclude the necessity of bringing matters of religion before such a tribunal, on the distinct plea that the laity at large could judge of them in every particular.*

Now, it is impossible for a deist or sceptic to urge that I have insisted too strenuously upon this particular fact; for, very fortunately, we have a case in point, so positive, that it is absolutely impossible to reduce the value of my exposition.

This case is in Deut. xviii. 20, 21, 22.

“But the prophet which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

And if thou say in thy heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?

When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him.”

Here, then, is a case supposed, and direction given concerning it; and though the offence be the very highest degree of religious obliquity, yet the priesthood had no cognizance of the matter, but it was entirely referred to the judgment of the laity, who were to decide by the event. There was no consultation of Urim to be made, but they were to await, patiently, the consummation of the particular case, in order to see whether Jehovah had spoken to them or not. My observation, of course, is only applied to the prophet *speaking presumptuously* in the name of Jehovah; for the prophet who spoke in the name of another God, was, in that very fact, to be put to death, though he might actually exhibit signs and

* And yet the theory of teaching the people to regard the judgment of the priesthood is recognized in the Scriptures distinctly in certain particulars; for in Deut. xxiv. 8, it is expressly said on the subject of the leprosy: “*Take heed that thou observe diligently and do according to all that the priests shall teach you.*” Now here is a positive command given upon this indifferent matter, and yet the Scripture does not in a single passage direct or instruct the people to look to the priesthood for any doctrinal exposition whatever.

wonders; see Deut. xiii. 1, 2, 3; and the reason there assigned why Jehovah would permit so deluding an exhibition to be made.

I also add, as a further evidence of the inability of the Jewish priesthood to exert any improper influence on the minds of the religious laity, that they held no power nor authority to pronounce absolution, whether for the nation at large, or for individuals. The consciences of the penitent were the only sources of that consolation. If they had honestly and humbly performed what the law of God required for the expiation of their sins, they knew the faithfulness of Jehovah, in his promise, to be sufficient, without any confirmation of the truth by the priesthood.

To further establish the religious integrity of the founders of the Jewish church, we have yet another argument to insist upon, based on the extreme minuteness and particularity of the observances of the Jewish institutions, and which, nevertheless, are totally silent upon all those particulars which would be so much sought after by knavish, designing priests. The deductions are too important to be omitted by us, though we do not carry them out to the length they deserve, for want of room. I shall throw them into three distinct sections, and the reader will appreciate, at a glance, the evident nature of the distinctions.

Sundry quotations of enactments, made by Moses, for the protection of foreigners, servants, widows, and orphans:

Thou shalt not vex nor oppress *a stranger, nor widow, nor fatherless child*; for if they cry at all unto me, (i. e. to God,) I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. Exod. xxii. 21, 24; xxiii. 9: Levit. xix. 33, 34.

If a man smite out the eye or the tooth of *a servant*, they shall be made free for the suffering of that injury. Exod. xxi. 26, 27.

Thou shalt not oppress *an hired servant*, that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of *the strangers* that are in thy land, within thy gates. At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it, for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it, lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, *and it be sin unto thee*. Deut. xxiv. 13, 14: Levit. xix. 13.

And yet, notwithstanding the remarkable minuteness of the above enactments, and of numerous others that we might bring forward, there is not a single passage in the Scripture that denounces a man for not paying his tithes to the priesthood; for striking out their eyes or teeth, or for any other injury, direct or indirect, to which they might be liable.

Truly, the Jewish priesthood, if impostors, were incomprehensible in their scheme; for it is utterly inconceivable how they could make the above enactments, or the reiterations of protection to strangers, quoted on page 147, and never promulgate the least legal immunity or privilege for themselves.

Sundry enactments requiring honor, deference, and respect, to be paid to certain individuals:

Ye shall fear every man, his *mother*, and his father. (Levit. xix. 3.)

Thou shalt not curse the *deaf*, nor put a stumbling block before the *blind*. (Levit. xix. 14.)

Thou shalt rise up before the *hoary head*, and honor the face of the *old man*. (Levit. xix. 32.)

And yet, it is no where enjoined in the Scripture, that any formal reverence, honor, or respect, whatever, was due to the priesthood; nay, even though there is an enactment that a man should not curse the magistrates or civil ruler, (Exod. xxii. 28,) yet maledictions are not formally prohibited to be used against the priesthood, sensitive as one would suppose ecclesiastical impostors might be on such a point.

In the third place; I shall close this argument with the enumeration of sundry enactments of apparently trivial matters, to some of which the highest grade of punishments were annexed; and let the reader ask himself the question, how it could be possible that impostors and knaves (for as such the Jewish priesthood are regarded by the deists) could be so exceedingly particular and minute in their legislation, and yet forbear to introduce one single law that should bring power, reverence, or wealth, to their order?

Whoever compoundeth an oil like the consecrated oil of Aaron, &c., shall be cut off from his people. (Exod. xxx. 33, 38.)

Whosoever should eat fat or blood, to be cut off from his people. (Levit. vii. 25, 27.)

The man that gathered sticks on Sabbath put to death. (Numb. xv. 32 to 37.)

Thou shalt not sow a field with mingled seed, neither shall a garment of mixed wool and linen come upon thee. (Levit. xix. 19.)

Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together. (Deut. xxii. 10.)

The two sexes forbidden to wear each other's clothes. (Deut. xxii. 5.)

Thou shalt not take the bird and its young together, &c. (Deut. xxii. 6.) To this commandment has been added, either intentionally

or accidentally, the promise, that they who observed this precept, should *prolong their days*.

Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard. (Levit. xix. 27.)

Ye shall put fringes, and ribbons upon your garments. (Numb. xv. 38, 39.)

Now is it not utterly incredible, that the official agents by whom so many particular enactments have been made, and so many of them apparently on trivial matters,—who have recorded either the enactment, or its reiteration, nine several times, prohibiting them from holding real estate,—is it not incredible that such persons could have been knaves and impostors, when they have not promulgated a single law that decrees them honor, wealth, immunity, or power! Who further made themselves dependent on the religious conscience of the laity for their subsistence, and whose special interest in its payment, was only urged under the sanctionless exhortation, but twice recorded in the Bible, “Take care that thou forget not the Levite.”

The characters of Moses and the priesthood, therefore, as implicated in the promulgation of the Pentateuch, must be considered wholly free from any suspicion of knavery and imposture, for in every particular, whether as magistrates or ecclesiastics, they have omitted to introduce any appointment, law, or precept, by which they could procure power, wealth, or temporal influence. Now as the enjoyment of such particulars, constitute the sole end and object of fraud and imposture, as it is for such things alone that men in every age have become either hypocrites or impostors, so it is utterly incredible and absurd that the promulgators of the Jewish economy could have been such persons. It is most undeniable that every law proclaimed by them, is not only free from any suspicion of interested selfishness, but is indeed diametrically opposed to the very principle of any selfish scheme or contrivance, whatever.*

Anomalous and irreconcilable as all the enactments of the Pentateuch are, to the supposition of an ecclesiastical imposture, they

* From the statements we have now made, the reader can appreciate the accuracy, or the honesty, of the speculations of Lord Shaftsbury, Bolingbroke, &c. on the Scripture writings.

Lord Shaftsbury says, “that the holy records themselves, were no other than the pure invention and artificial compilement of an interested party, in behalf of the richest corporation and most profitable monopoly, which could be erected in the world.”

Lord Bolingbroke has said, “the truth is, that ignorance and superstition, pride, injustice, and barbarity, were the peculiar characteristics of the Jewish people. The principles of their religion formed them to every part of this character.”—Bolingbroke’s Letter on Tillotson’s Sermons.

are, in all their singular omissions of matters concerning the temporal interests of the priesthood, harmonious with the simple theory of the Jewish or Christian religion, and have been framed with consummate knowledge of the infirmity of human nature, to prevent, to the utmost, any accidental abuse of ecclesiastical influence.

The whole theory and scope of our religious system, is, that man as a free agent, is undergoing probation or discipline *before Jehovah himself*, and therefore, as a free agent, and as an intellectual and moral being, is responsible *to Jehovah alone* for the acts of his life, his thoughts, conversation, and every other particular involved in his moral existence. To compel mankind, as it were, to exercise themselves individually in their probationary state, the utmost care seems to have been taken by Moses, as the messenger of Jehovah, to confine the priesthood to their typical function of merely offering the appointed sacrifices within the limits of the sanctuary. Out of this their peculiar function, we meet either with no enactment concerning them, or those that would diametrically oppose them, did they presume to interfere in any of those matters that involved the free agency of the laity.

As simple citizens, there was nothing to forbid the priesthood, when competent, to *enlighten the understanding* of laymen; but every precaution was taken that they should not *control the consciences* of the laity, by any implied *divine authority*. And so effectual were these institutions of Moses in their operation, that there is no record of the Jewish priesthood having ever attempted such an influence. The corruption of doctrine that ultimately prevailed in the Jewish church, arose from the laity themselves. The scribes and the Pharisees alone have borne the censures of our Saviour.

The extraordinary appearance of disregard, concerning the interests of a body of men consecrated to the service of Jehovah, by his own ordinance, may possibly induce some persons to consider that we have proved too much, and that our argument is therefore injured by such proofs. To such an objection, we reply, that the weight of our argument, alone, utterly destroys the theory that the Jewish priesthood stood upon any foundation of human device, fraud, or imposture; and it is impossible that we can accumulate too much proof on that point. But, in truth, there was no neglect of the priesthood in the constitution of the Jewish church, on the contrary, they stood upon the surest and the richest foundation that a priesthood ever enjoyed. Jehovah himself was their portion and inheritance.*

* "And the Lord spake unto Aaron, thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them. *I am thy part and inheritance among the children of Israel.*"—Numb. xviii. 20.

Standing on such a foundation as this, it must have been a matter of supreme indifference to the religious priest, or Levite, as to any provision that the mere letter of the law might make for them; and all those that did perform their duties conscientiously, found Jehovah faithful in his promise. Hence it was that the religious priest, or Levite, never failed of a provision in the bounty and providence of Jehovah, and hence they have never complained in the Scriptures that men failed to pay them their tithes, or were deficient to them in reverence. When they may have incidentally related particulars bearing on such points, it was done, as we shall show hereafter, without indignation, or even without comment on the transaction. All these and similar matters that are totally irreconcilable with the supposition of imposture, are facts that constitute the very essence and harmony of that really divine appointment, in which they stood connected with Jehovah, that God who made the heavens, the earth, and all things that are therein, and whose promise, as it never can, so it never will fail.

But though the honors and subsistence of the Jewish priesthood was guaranteed them by the Creator of all things, the attainment and the enjoyment stood upon the condition that they should faithfully discharge the duties assigned to them, whether as concerned God, or their fellow men.

The Jewish priesthood then as being men, and subject to all the infirmity of other men, stood before God as free agents, undergoing intellectual and moral discipline; they were free to stand, and free to fall, and they did both. If they acted conscientiously and uprightly, they were protected and blessed of Jehovah, and if they acted irreligiously or unjustly, they were forsaken by his providence, and punished as other irreligious men.

Let this view of the intellectual and moral condition of the Jewish priesthood, explain any of those particular acts of irreligion or immorality, that may be imputed to them in the Scripture page; for being like other men under trial before Jehovah, they were obnoxious to all human infirmities and frailties, and which to their honor, be it said, they have not in the Scripture, attempted in a single passage to extenuate or justify, even by a reference to the common infirmity of human nature.

I must presume that the evidence we have produced, must be sufficient to convince any honest sceptic, that it is impossible that the Pentateuch, which contains *all the laws and enactments* of the Jewish theocracy, could have been framed either by ambitious magistrates, or knavish ecclesiastics. In this fact, therefore, several interesting and important particulars are determined.

1st. That the composition of the Pentateuch cannot have been either the primary or substantial act of Samuel, of Hilkiah, of Ezra, or of any other nameless individuals, for then they would have been forgers and impostors, had it been thus written. But we have proved that it could not have been written by knaves or impostors, since every enactment, as well as the whole scope of the book, is directly hostile to the end and purpose of any impostor, whether civilian, or ecclesiastic, or whether he may have lived at an earlier or later period of time.

2d. Our argument in establishing the fact, that the Pentateuch was not written by an impostor, establishes the fact that it was written substantially by Moses, or from his dictation, for none else but Moses could have written or authorised the legal or religious enunciations made in the Pentateuch, without being an impostor.

Though it is undoubted, that sundry matters have been either inadvertently added to the original text of these books, or may have been introduced by some presumptuous impertinence of exalting the glory of the Jewish nation, yet it has been sufficiently proved, and might be made much more conclusive, had we space, that nothing has been added to the text that can impeach the disinterestedness, and religious integrity of the biblical writers, from the days of Moses down to the time of the dissolution of the Jewish economy. For our examination has been made upon the Pentateuch, *as it now exists*, and as such, it bears the weight of all that asserted, or implied ecclesiastical knavery, which can be possibly imagined to have influenced a supposed selfish priesthood to study their interests, during the long time that they have proclaimed the existence and authority of the Pentateuch.

But as we have proved this book of Moses wholly free from every suspicion of ecclesiastical fraud and imposture, it follows that any emendation of the text, can be only critical, and such as is applied to the correction of any other ancient book.

The religious doctrines therein taught, or the moral observances therein inculcated, it is impossible to correct or amend, for, according to our present copies, they inform us that on the score of religion, we should reverence and serve Jehovah with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and as to our moral duties, that we should regard the welfare of our fellow creatures, by the same standard that we appreciate our own. And to this general theory not a single precept or commandment is anomalous. How then is it possible that the Pentateuch can have been corrupted in its doctrine since the days of its promulgation.

Having thus vindicated the Pentateuch as the CONSTITUTION of the Jewish church and state, and out of which book no single enactment, under divine sanction, was ever published to them, I shall now proceed with arguments derived from other of the biblical writings, to ascertain the credibility of those writers who succeeded Moses, whether as administering the Jewish church, according to his institutions, or as gradually preparing us for the expansion of that dispensation, into the universal scheme of Christianity.

CHAPTER VIII.

HISTORICAL NOTICES OF THE JEWISH PRIESTHOOD AFTER THE SETTLEMENT IN THE LAND OF CANAAN.

HAVING sufficiently shown that the Jewish government was administered *not by the priesthood*, but by laymen, it is deemed a matter of no importance to analyse the history of their rulers or kings, for they were avowedly in the same condition as the rulers or kings of other nations; free agents, undergoing the common trial appointed to mankind, free to act right, and free to do wrong, and as such the Bible represents them with the greatest impartiality. But as their history does not throw any direct light upon the subject we are investigating, we shall not enter upon its particular consideration.

This indifference, however, does not apply to the history of the Jewish priesthood in the times subsequent to Moses and Joshua; for their functions, as asserted in the Scripture, were, for a series of ages, exercised under all the particulars of the original constitutions of Moses. Communications, as if from Jehovah, were still made from time to time, and miracles were still performed, showing that the same God who had brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt still exercised a providential government over all those matters that concerned the interests of this remarkable people.

Such assertions as these involve, in the view of deists and sceptics, much objection, under the charge or suspicion that they were priestly contrivances for selfish and corrupt purposes, and which the advocates of the Scriptures are required to justify in principle, or to demonstrate in truth.

As to justifying the reasonableness of the appointments or commands of the Deity, we undertake nothing, governing ourselves by those arguments that we have exhibited on this subject in our prefatory chapters, and to which the acutest of the deists and sceptics have given their warranty, as being correct.

But we can very satisfactorily investigate the truth of many matters of fact occurring in the history of the Jewish priesthood, on the intelligible ground of abundant familiarity with the motives that excite mankind to any particular actions. We can discern, without much difficulty, where selfishness, ambition, and sensuality are at

work, for we are sufficiently acquainted with the fact of the universal domination of such passions, and we can easily appreciate the true nature of the system that purposes to develop itself in a manner consistent with the views of the projectors of such machinery.

Upon this ground we shall now proceed to scrutinize every passage in the historical books of the Old Testament where any transaction occurs in which the priesthood were concerned. For the priesthood alone have been considered, by the deists, as the authors of Scripture history, and the contrivers of all the theological machinery introduced in the Bible page. The inspection of the historical books, therefore, is of great importance in this particular, as it must show how the ecclesiastical system worked in its practice. If the institutions of Moses were the contrivance of a knavish priesthood, the after history of the nation and church must be a perpetual commentary upon the selfish principles of the original institution; for it must be evident, that if a knavish priesthood devised the Mosaic economy, they did not intend it to be a speculative theory, but one of practical use. An examination of the historical books of the Old Testament, therefore, will determine this matter sufficiently.

The first mention made of the priesthood, after the time of Joshua, is in Judges xvii. 7, which relates that a Levite became a priest to a certain Micah, who idolatrously had made a graven image, a molten image, &c. This priest, together with the images, were carried off, by the Danites, who established them in their tribe at the city of Dan, where they continued in their idolatrous uses until the captivity of the land.

This transaction, so discreditable to the priestly body, and so directly contrary to the institutes of Moses, requires no comment from us; for surely the priesthood never forged the relation, nor is it possible for any one to conceive the record could be profitable to them in any manner whatever.

The next occurrence in which the priesthood are mentioned, was concerning the abominable transaction at Gibeah, Judges xix. It may be well to observe, that the injured Levite made no address to the hierarchy, but appealed to the officers of the different tribes in their civil capacities alone.

In conducting this matter, as the Benjamites refused to deliver up those concerned in this criminal affair, Jehovah was consulted through the priest, by Urim and Thummim, and answer was given accordingly. That Jehovah had promised such judgments, we have already stated in our former discourse. This consultation, therefore, was an official act of the high priest, consistent with that

promise. Whether it be true or not, it is impossible for us to prove by any other testimony than that of the author of the book of Judges. The reader, if he thinks we have not furnished already sufficient proof to justify the credibility of a transaction like the above, must hold the matter in suspense until we have completed the exhibition of all those arguments we are yet to produce as justifying the integrity and veracity of the Scripture authors.

The next place where the priesthood are mentioned, is the detail of certain particulars concerning Eli, both judge and high priest of Israel. It is impossible to conjecture by what means he had attained to the judgeship, as we have no historic relation on the subject. The fact is remarkable in this particular, that he was the only priest that ever did attain to political importance in Jewish history, anterior to the Babylonish captivity.

But the facts related concerning Eli, are abundantly sufficient to destroy any theory that supposes the occurrences there stated were forgeries of a knavish priesthood. Indeed I should suppose it impossible for the deist to conceive how the narration has been preserved to our time, through the hands of a supposed knavish priesthood, without inferring a perpetual stupidity among the order, unexampled in human history.

The Bible, after relating several immoral acts of Eli's children, represents, that a prophet, bearing a message from Jehovah, came to Eli, denouncing punishment on him for immoralities and irreverence in the public worship, both on his part and that of his two sons, which we shall quote from 1 Sam. chap. ii. 27—33.

“And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father when they were in Egypt, in Pharaoh's house?

And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offering made by fire of the children of Israel?

Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation, and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?

Wherefore, the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever. But now, the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

Behold, the days come that I will cut off thine arm and the arm of thy father's house, that there shalt not be an old man in thy house.

And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation in all the wealth that God shall give Israel: and there shalt not be an old man in thy house for ever.

And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes and to grieve thy heart, and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age," &c. &c.

The whole history, therefore, of Eli, is a singular anomaly, indeed, in the history of priestcraft. For one would think a knavish priesthood would be desirous to exhibit their order, honorable and acceptable in the sight of God and man; instead of which, we here see the direct contrary. But, not to insist on this fact at the present moment, as we have yet a similar denunciation against Eli to introduce, we shall pass to the ensuing chapter, which informs us that Jehovah instructed a little boy, supposed to be about twelve years of age, one of the singers of the Levitical body, to repeat the preceding denunciation against the high priest. The whole narration is exceedingly artless, bearing in itself strong internal evidence of its truth; but, as it is too long to quote entire, we shall alone extract the words that Jehovah is represented to have spoken; see 1 Sam. iii. 11—14.

"And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not.

And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever."

It altogether exceeds my power of comprehension to understand, how there can be any priestly fraud implied in the above history of Eli. It seems to me ridiculous in the extreme, that any one could suppose a priest forged these miraculous relations; for they not only represent the high priest in an immoral, discreditable light, but they substantially affect the whole priestly order, by transferring the honor of the divine communication from the priesthood to a child, belonging to a body who were entirely subordinate to them. In no particulars could a knavish priesthood be more sensitive than in the above cases. To suppose they forged such relations would imply insanity.

It is scarcely less wonderful how the narration has been preserved

from ancient time to the present, considering the palpable inferences that every layman might make on the subject. First, that a high priest might be as irreligious in the sight of God as any one else; and, secondly, that God had made use of a child, from a subordinate class, to warn the high priest of his sin and its impending punishment. Surely no ecclesiastical knaves could have ever desired such doctrines to prevail among the laity.

The next place in which a priest is mentioned is in 1 Sam. xiv. 18, 37; which simply relates, that Ahiah, the priest, was with Saul at Gibeah, and consulted God, I presume by Urim and Thummim, to know whether they should engage the Philistine army in battle. This was an official act of the priest, conformable to Mosaic appointment, and involves no farther discussion than an asserted fact. We have no direct means of ascertaining whether the relation be true or false; it depends, alone, on the veracity of the Scripture writer.

The next occurrence in which the priesthood were involved is recorded in 1 Sam. xxi. and xxii., where it is stated, that the high priest, and others of the order, incurred the displeasure of Saul, under the suspicion that they had favored the escape of David, whom Saul was pursuing. Full of madness and fury, he ordered them to be put to death; which is thus related:

“And the king said unto the footmen, that stood about him, Turn and slay the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord.

And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.”

Is there nothing in this transaction deserving our special consideration? Is this atrocious massacre a mere matter of historic record, that is to interest us no further than to ascertain the chronological date of its occurrence? From the examination of the more popular commentaries on these chapters of the Bible, one would scarcely think it involved any particular interest. Yet it appears to me to possess so singular a degree of importance, that there are few passages in the Old Testament of equal value in determining the credibility of Scripture writers. For, let us ask what individual wrote the pre-

ceding history. Was it a priest? And who but knavish priests are considered, by deists and sceptics, to have written the Bible? And was the priest who wrote the above a knave and deluder of the people, who, in describing the massacre of the high priest and of his assistants, omitted to represent that such an act was of the deepest enormity. Yet unaccountable as it may seem, not only did the original writer forbear to insist upon the sin of slaying the high priest, but it is not the less astonishing, that during the after ages of Jewish history, there never has been found a single knavish priest to interpolate an expression of Jehovah's anger and vengeance against Saul for having put the high priest and eighty-five other priests to death.*

Yet, it is abundantly evident, that there was no want of opportunity to have introduced a record of the divine displeasure in this matter, for in the concluding passages of Saul's life, when the ghost of Samuel appeared to him, his condemnation is stated to have come from Jehovah, because he had not executed his order of extermination upon the Amalakites, 1 Sam. xxviii. 18. The author of 1 Chron. x. 13, also makes a similar mention of Saul. But neither of them say one word concerning the massacre of the priesthood at Nob.

Now, surely, whether we consider the relation to have been thus made originally, or that an interpolation was never made in after time, declaring Saul's offence to be of the most heinous nature, it is absolutely inconsistent with our experience and knowledge of human nature, to suppose that priestly impostors either wrote or had afterwards the sole custody of the biblical writings.

The next passage where a priest is introduced, is where David consulted Jehovah, through the priest, to know whether it was safe for him to remain in the town of Keilah. 1 Sam. xxiii. 9 to 12.

The next passage is of a similar nature. David consulted by Urim whether he should pursue the Amalekites after they had pillaged his town of Ziklag. 1 Sam. xxx. 7 and 8.

* That the reader may appreciate this extraordinary silence of the Scripture writers on an event so atrocious against the Jewish hierarchy, I request him to ponder on the following observation of Hume: "Few men can bear contradiction with patience; but the clergy too often proceed even to a degree of fury on this head; because all their credit and livelihood depend upon the belief which their opinions meet with; and they alone pretend to a divine and supernatural authority, or have any color for representing their antagonists as impious and profane. The *Odium Theologium*, or theological hatred, is noted even to a proverb, and means that degree of rancor which is the most furious and implacable."—*Hume's Essay on National Characters*.

If the Scriptures be an ecclesiastical fraud, as the deists suppose, what can be more inexplicable than the forbearance of the writers on the massacre of the priests as above stated.

We have already stated that such consultations were appointments of Jehovah in the Mosaic institutions. As to their actual truth or falsehood, there can be no direct evidence produced. As matters of fact, they depend alone on the credibility allowed to the author of the relation.

The next instance, in chronological order, is when David directed the ark to be brought up from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem. 1 Chron. xiii. xiv. xv. xvi. In this transaction the priests were officially employed under the direction of the king, who composed the psalm sung by the Levites on the occasion. The character of the priesthood is no ways involved in the history.

The priesthood are next mentioned, incidentally, in 2 Sam. xv. 24—30, which states that Zadok, Abiathar, and the Levites went forth from Jerusalem with David, when he fled from his son Absalom.

The next mention of the priests is 2 Sam. xix. 11, where David asks of the priests that they should use their influence with the elders of Judah, that he might be again reinstated in the throne lately usurped by Absalom.

The next place where notice is taken of the priesthood is in 1 Chron. xxiii. xxiv. xxv. xxvi. where the priests and Levites are enumerated and classed by an order of David.

We next find mention made of the priesthood, 1 Kings i. which relates the different pretensions of Adonijah and Solomon to the succession of David's throne, and that Abiathar and Zadok espoused different sides of the questions. There is nothing particular involved in the transaction to impeach the integrity of either of the priests in preferring one aspirant rather than the other, so far as the Scripture informs us. In 1 Kings ii. 15, Adonijah speaks very confidently as to his natural right to the throne, and which Solomon himself seems to admit, as stated in verse 22 of the same chapter.

The next occurrence in the history of the priesthood, is the remarkable instance in which Solomon deprives Abiathar of the dignity of being high priest, 1 Kings ii. 26. A transaction eminently exhibiting how superior the civil authorities were to the priesthood, but which we have already sufficiently exhibited in a former page.

But the present instance is a very suitable one for us to reiterate the question, are the Scriptures indeed the composition of a knavish priesthood, or have they been vitiated by priestly hands in a later time?

Did ever priestly impostors relate, before or since, or is it consistent with common sense that they should relate, that a civil ruler could eject the high priest from his function and that the indignation

of God was not manifested upon the offender. Yet the Bible affords no such comment on the proceeding, not for want of opportunity or from regard to the reputation of Solomon, for it tells us, on a suitable occasion, that the king incurred the displeasure of Jehovah for his idolatrous practices, and who, in consequence, sent him a message by a prophet, declaring he would rend the kingdom from him for that offence. But not a word is ever said concerning the act of ejecting Abiathar the high priest, a transgression, which in the view of priestly knaves and impostors, could have been nothing less than the greatest enormity he could have committed. How unaccountable that the Scripture, whose end and purpose, according to deistical theory, was to delude the people, that the priesthood might govern them, should relate that the civil ruler could degrade the high priest from his sacred appointment without incurring the anger and vengeance of an offended Deity.

The next occurrence in which the priesthood were implicated, was at the consecration of the temple built by Solomon, 1 Kings viii. But before we call the reader's attention to the relation there made, it is necessary that we should relate certain matters that occurred previous to the building of the temple, which we consider too important to be passed over without due consideration. These circumstances, connected with the project of building a temple to Jehovah, are stated 1 Chron. xvii. 1, &c.

"Now it came to pass as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord remaineth under curtains, (i. e. in a tent.)

Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that is in thine heart, for God is with thee.

And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan saying.

Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in.

For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day, but have gone from tent to tent and from one tabernacle to another," &c. &c.

Though there are several other verses on this subject, the above are sufficient to answer the purpose of the present exposition. We learn by those quoted, that, during all the time that had elapsed from Joshua to David, or a period of more than five hundred years, that the piety of the nation had never been stimulated to build a temple to Jehovah by the arts and influences of the priesthood, an undertaking one would suppose they had a direct interest to excite.

And now, most strangely, when a powerful king offers to build a temple, we find the prophet Nathan making a communication as from Jehovah himself, representing that though the piety of the king's intention was accepted by the Deity, yet he prohibits him from making such an erection. The reason of this prohibition on the part of Jehovah is stated 1 Chron. xxii. 7, 8, 9.

"And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God.

But the word of the Lord came to me saying. Thou hast shed blood abundantly and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight."

This statement is confirmed also by 1 Chron. xxviii. 2 and 3, where it is related that David assembled his officers in great numbers.

"Then David, the king, stood up upon his feet and said: Hear me my brethren and my people. As for me I had in my heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building.

But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war and hast shed blood."

Now, it is utterly impossible, according to any testimony which has been furnished by human experience, that such relations as are quoted above can be the work of fraud and imposture. Was there ever any other body of priests, either in past or present time, who have objected to a warrior building a temple to God, on the ground that he had shed much blood? On the contrary, how many religious buildings have been erected to expiate the sins of the shedder of blood? In what light, then, can we consider this astonishing anomaly in ecclesiastical history, that the Jewish priests, who had not even one single temple in the whole land, should decline the erection of one when freely offered by their king; and, pretending a communication from their God, decline it on the ground that their sovereign had shed much blood?

But, though Jehovah is represented as refusing a temple from David as a "man of blood," he assures David that his son and successor should erect him a temple, and that he should have a reign of peace and prosperity; that he might consecrate the temple with pure and bloodless hands, and thus it was done. Solomon reigned in peace and in unexampled prosperity; built the celebrated Temple of Jerusalem; furnished it in the most magnificent manner: and the Bible tells us it was further honored by Jehovah with the miracu-

lous manifestations of his presence. This, again, the infidel will say, was trick and imposture; but for what purpose was the trick played? Favorable as the occasion was to priestcraft, there is not a syllable said, or sign given, whereby the priestly office is either magnified or extended in their privileges; they still hold nothing but their tithes, and those dependant on the free will of the nation: they are not allowed to hold real estate any more than in the days of Moses:—and all that this supposed juggling miracle produced, was the following revelation from Jehovah, not communicated even by or through a priest, but to Solomon himself, as is related in 1 Kings ix. 3 to 9.

“And the Lord said to Solomon, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before me. I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

And if thou wilt walk before me as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and will keep my statutes and my judgments.

Then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel forever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, ‘There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel.

But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes, which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them; then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them, and this house which I have hallowed, for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall become a proverb and a by-word among all people.

And this house which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, why hath the Lord done this unto this land and to this house?

And they shall answer, because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them and served them; therefore hath the Lord brought upon them all this evil.”

A grand object indeed, Solomon and his knavish priesthood gained, in stating to the deluded people, this revelation that Jehovah had made to the king. Who is there so silly among men as to believe the object of knaves and impostors, in contriving such machinery, was to receive such an answer as is represented to have come to Solomon; an answer in which neither king or priest are commended, or assured of special favor and protection?

But let us ask, has not the threatened punishment been fulfilled? Is not Israel a by-word and reproach? And where is the temple? Were the Scripture writers, indeed, guilty of fraud and imposture when they penned the above prophetic relation?

The next transaction in chronological order concerning the priesthood, is in 2 Chron. xi. 13, 14, which relates that the priests and Levites came up to Jerusalem, abandoning their cities and possessions in the kingdom of Jeroboam in consequence of the idolatrous establishment made by him in the now separate kingdom of Israel.

We next find mention of the priesthood in 2 Chron. xiii. 14, where it states the priests sounded the trumpets immediately preceding a battle between Abijah and Jeroboam. In the message previously sent to Jeroboam, Abijah reproaches him with having set up an idolatrous religion, and for having disregarded the priests and Levites in the exercise of their functions as appointed by Moses.

The next mention of the priesthood is in 2 Chron. xvii. 9, 10, which relates that Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, directed his princes, officers, and certain priests and Levites to go throughout the kingdom, and teach the people out of the book of the Law of the Lord.

We find mention again made of the priests and Levites in 2 Chron. xix. 8 to 11, where Jehoshaphat reorganizes and establishes them in the exercise of their peculiar functions at Jerusalem.

In the ensuing chapter we find mention made of the Levites, under the following circumstances. The Moabites, Ammonites, and some other nations advanced in hostile array against Jehoshaphat, causing great consternation and alarm. But while the king and his people were making supplication to Jehovah against these enemies, it is stated that the Spirit of God came upon Jahaziel, a Levite, who tells the king and people to dismiss their fears, for Jehovah would miraculously deliver them from their foes; which was presently fulfilled before them.

As we are unable to prove the miraculous deliverance of Jehoshaphat by any direct manner, or from any disinterested testimony, we can say nothing on this matter.

If it be a forgery, the singular disinterestedness of the priesthood is worthy of admiration, in the fact that they should forbear to assume the credit of the miraculous deliverance to themselves, and should attribute it to one of the singers among the Levites.

The next passage of Scripture that notices the priesthood, is 2 Kings, xi. 4, &c. Jehoiada, the high-priest, having saved Jehoash from the massacre by which his family were exterminated, secretes him in the temple for several years. He afterwards brings him

forth as the lawful heir to the throne, and with the assistance of the soldiery, destroys the usurped government of queen Athaliah.

The whole transaction was perfectly honorable and correct, though I am sorry the high priest was so situated as to have any direction in the counter revolution. Was it not for this single transaction we could assert without any dispute, that the priests never took any part in the political revolutions of the nation. Nevertheless, the agency of the high priest was humane and honorable, and is liable to no improper imputation.

The next instance to be observed is 2 Kings xii. 4, &c. Here it is related that Jehoash censured the priesthood for not making the necessary repairs to the temple, though they had received money officially from the people according to the law of Moses, and which would imply that they should, from the sums thus received, keep the sanctuary in good repair. I do not perceive that the priesthood had been guilty of any offence by not making the repairs, but certainly it would have been much more to their credit had they done so. The repairs of the temple were afterwards made by voluntary contributions among the people.

The next relation we have concerning the priests, is to be found in chronological order, in 2 Chron. xxiv. 17, &c. From which we learn that after the death of Jehoiada the high priest, who had preserved the life and kingdom of Joash, the influence of his officers and courtiers seduced the king into idolatrous practices, for which the wrath of God came upon Jerusalem and Judah, &c. The extract concerning the priest is the following:

“And the spirit of God came upon Zachariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper, because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you.

And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord.”

As the reader must be, by this time, familiar with the views by which we have hitherto regarded these incidental notices of supernatural transactions, we forbear to repeat them.

The next instance relative to the priesthood, is recorded in 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, &c. By that chapter, we learn that Azariah the high-priest, with his assistants, forcibly prevented king Uzziah from performing an act in the temple that alone pertained to the priestly office.

“And they withstood Uzziah, the king, and said unto him, It ap-

pertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord; but to the sons of Aaron that are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the temple for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honor from the Lord God," &c.

But, Uzziah, persisting in his attempt, was struck with a leprosy and went out the temple bearing the displeasure of God on him, and so continued a leper to his death.

As to this circumstance, we have no testimony to urge, in which the truth of the fact may be demonstrated. If the institutions of Moses were appointed or sanctioned by Jehovah, it was perfectly consistent with such an appointment, that king Uzziah should be punished by the deity for his presumptuous intrusion into a service, contrary to his express directions.

The next matter in chronological order, is related 2 Kings xvi. 10 to 16. We are there told that king Ahaz, when at Damascus, was so much pleased with the fashion of an idolatrous altar erected there, that he sent the pattern of it to the high priest at Jerusalem to have one made like it, which was done accordingly.

This discreditable act, on the part of the high priest, has certainly not been an interpolation by artful ecclesiastics. It is more strange that the relation has been suffered to continue in all copies of the Bible, supposing the Jewish priesthood to have been knaves and impostors, in succeeding times.

The next event in the ecclesiastical history of the Jewish priesthood, occupies three chapters in 2 Chron. xxix. &c. They relate the various steps pursued by Hezekiah, king of Judah, to reform and reorganize the church in his reign. It will be useless for us to go into any investigation of the official acts of the king or functions of the priesthood, as they involve no matter of important consideration but in one particular, viz.

"Moreover, the king commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem, to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the Lord.

And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance of the first fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field, and the tithe of all things, brought they abundantly," &c.

This passage is remarkable in this particular, that it is the first time, since the days of Moses, that the tithe is mentioned. A period of above eight hundred years.

Surely the knavish priests that have been charged with the composition of the biblical writings, had strangely neglected the selfish

contrivance attributed to Moses respecting their tithes. One would think that whilst they were writing so many histories of kings, and soldiers, and priests, they might have devoted some attention to their own subsistence, either to have commended the tithe payer or to inform them how sinful it was to withhold the tithe of God's priests, and then to show what divine judgments had followed such omissions. Yet not a word has been said concerning the matter in all the historical books of the Scripture, but in this one place, where it is merely related as an ordinary particular of history. It certainly is difficult, under any opinion of the Jewish economy, to explain the remarkable omission observable in all the Scripture historians concerning tithes. But nothing can be more incomprehensible and absurd, than any attempt to reconcile the fact, with the theory, that considers the Jewish priests to have been knaves and impostors.

The next occurrence pertaining to the history of the priesthood, is related in 2 Kings xix. 2, &c. It is there recorded that Hezekiah sent several officers and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, *a layman* of the tribe of Judah, to intreat his prayers for the deliverance of Jerusalem, then besieged by an Assyrian army.

This circumstance is a very remarkable one towards testing the integrity of the Scripture writings on the charge of being a priestly contrivance. For it is inconceivable that any knavish priest should relate, that the prayers of *a layman* could be more prevailing with God than what they could offer in virtue of their ecclesiastical appointments.

Yet, notwithstanding this self-evident view, the priests did come to Isaiah, and Jehovah did reveal his purpose to them, through the prophet. Was this remarkable circumstance and this miraculous communication a forgery of the priests? If it was, it is vastly more disinterested than our experience would have justified us to have expected from priestly impostors. We should have anticipated they would have taken the credit to themselves, instead of ascribing it to *a layman*.

The next transaction in which the priesthood were concerned, is related in 2 Kings xxii. We here are informed, that when the temple was repaired under the direction of king Josiah, that Hilkiah, the high-priest, in the execution of the work, found a book of the law of Moses, which, I presume, was the original copy that had been placed in the ark, or rather with the ark in the sanctuary. This circumstance, as estimated by the gross ignorance of its contents, both on the part of the king and high-priest, has made

this passage of great interest in all the deistical controversies; for they have pretended to see, in this history, the time when the Pentateuch was first fraudulently imposed on the people by the instrumentality of Hilkiah, the high-priest.*

Our answer to the deists will be very brief. We have nothing else to do than refer them to the analysis we have already made at page 164, &c. concerning the honesty and credibility of the writers of the Pentateuch, and in which we have, I apprehend, shown, conclusively, that it is impossible they could have been knaves and impostors. The arguments by which we established that conclusion, are absolute; *i. e.* they rest upon no particular theory of origin, and are, therefore, equally conclusive against any supposed fraud at any time whatever. If the arguments we have used, be sufficient to show the system to be wholly at variance with any supposition of fraud and imposture in the days of Moses, the very same arguments are conclusive against the supposition of a fraud in the days of Hilkiah, or at any other supposed time, be it when it may.

As I have already proved the institutions of the law of Moses free from even the smallest imputation of ecclesiastical knavery, any difficulty in appreciating the discovery of the book of the law by Hilkiah, and its attending circumstances, amounts to nothing more than a historical difficulty, which originates alone from the briefness of statement made on the subject.

As our embarrassment, therefore, proceeds from the want of a more particular account of this transaction, our explanation of it must be more or less conjectural. I apprehend the following speculation on the subject will place it in a very intelligible light.

The Scriptures represent the times preceding the reign of Josiah to have been very irreligious. The kings, the court, and the nation, generally, seem to be alike involved in the censures of the prophetic writers. But, notwithstanding their general irreligious conduct, the external rites, forms, and ceremonies, of their national religion were observed with all formality.

It must be remembered, however, that, before the return from the Babylonish captivity, there were no synagogues, nor places for religious instruction or worship, in all Judea, but at the temple at Jerusalem.† Here there was a formal and splendid service ren-

* The absurdity of the deists in giving this discovery of Hilkiah's so much credit as a historical statement, is a manifest proof of their great ignorance of the Scriptures; for why is this statement more creditable than that made in 2 Chron. xvii. 7 to 9, which represents Jehoshaphat, three hundred years before Josiah, to have sent persons to instruct the people from the book of the *Law of Jehovah*? Will they pretend that these books were not the same? If they do, the *onus probandi* lays on them.

† It may be supposed, and I know of nothing to contradict it, that opportu-

dered continually, but which consisted in making sacrifices, and chanting of psalms and hymns by musical choirs. There were no sermons or lectures delivered at the temple, and the reading of the Scriptures was restricted to a formal reading of the law once in seven years, according to the appointment of Moses.

Under such a system, it is clear, that, whatever opportunities existed for persons in their individual capacities to understand the Scriptures, yet, if they chose to neglect their privilege, they could easily lapse into gross ignorance by omitting to read them. Yet, at the same time, they might attend the services of the temple, and celebrate the great festivals of the nation with all formality.

The condition of the Jewish people, at this time, was analogous to the state of Christendom before the Reformation by Luther. Christianity was then, every where, exhibited in a splendid service of singing and chanting, of forms and ceremonies, at which all classes of persons assisted with all sincerity of ignorant devotion. But when the more devout body of people began to read the Scriptures for themselves, the surprise of the more enlightened portion at the exhibition of its inspired doctrine could hardly have been less than that of king Josiah.

The cases are so parallel, that the latter can sufficiently explain the more ancient difficulty, and should satisfy a reasonable sceptic that the ignorance of the king and high-priest concerning the contents of the Scripture, constitutes no objection to the supposition that copies of the Scripture were common enough with the religious Jews at that time, though the monarch and his courtly clergy were in great ignorance concerning their requirements and doctrines.

Under this same head, we shall also include the casual mention made of the sacrificial functions exercised by the priesthood at the time when Josiah renewed the covenant with Jehovah, and attempted to bring back the nation to a religious observance of the institutions of Moses. It may be well to remark, that, whatever views he or the priesthood may have entertained as to the possibility of averting the impending judgments of Jehovah, nothing could now arrest the coming vengeance. As it is said in 2 Kings xxiii. 26, 27.

“Notwithstanding, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, be-

nities for religious instruction were afforded in the cities of the priests and Levites, and also in the schools of the prophets. I have no doubt, also, but individuals every where throughout Judea instructed such as were desirous of knowing their religious duties. All I contend for is, that there were no places appointed for this purpose under the Jewish laws, and, therefore, there was no general or habitual resort, of the people at large, to places set apart for religious instruction, as was the case afterwards, when the synagogues were established.

cause of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.

And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said my name shall be there."

This is the last transaction in which the priesthood were concerned, previous to the Babylonian captivity. And the history of the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, and sack of Jerusalem, concludes with the following comment of the biblical writer, upon the previous history of the Jewish people. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14, &c.

"Moreover, *all the chief of the priests* and the people had transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.

And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people till there was no remedy.

Therefore, he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword, in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him who stooped for age, he gave them all into his hand.

And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon, where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia."

I should presume it impossible for any rational creature to suppose any knavish priest wrote the preceding statement, for it is the absolute moral to be deduced from all previous Jewish history. It must be evident that the writer wished his readers to consider the fatal consequences of the disobedience of their forefathers. He, therefore, enumerates, specifically, their offences and the punishment that followed such transgressions.

But not one word does he say of any disobedience or disrespect towards the priesthood, or of any neglect of the payment of their tithes, or of any thing else that concerned their privileges. On the contrary, he very expressly places the priesthood foremost in the list of those transgressors by whom Jehovah's vengeance had been excited. Nothing could be more preposterously absurd, than this

was the author a knavish priest. His chief end in writing the history could have been nothing else than to exalt his own order.

I see no sufficient object to make an analysis of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which are simple historical relations of the unhappy condition of the Jewish nation subsequent to their return from the captivity at Babylon, that had lasted for seventy years. They were now under the dominion of the Persian kings, and from the various officers connected with that monarchy, they suffered various afflictions and persecutions.

The chief aim of Ezra and Nehemiah was to re-establish the nation on the ancient foundations. For this purpose they made a covenant among themselves, under a curse, "to walk in God's law which was given by Moses, the servant of God," &c.

After the analysis we have previously made of those matters, whilst investigating those institutions of Moses that concern the priesthood, it would be superfluous to inquire into the merits of the hypothesis suggested by some of the deistical writers, that Ezra and Nehemiah were especially the knaves and impostors that either forged or falsified the ancient history of the Jews, and attributed their composition to Moses and other biblical writers. It is unnecessary for us to inquire into the truth or falsehood of such a conjecture, for the arguments by which we have justified the disinterestedness and integrity of the author of the Pentateuch, hold good against any theory of scepticism, it matters not who may be suggested to have written those books.

We have considered this subject *absolutely* at page 165, and if there is any value in argument, we have there vindicated the ordinances and appointments of those books from any possible suspicion of knavery or of priestly imposture. The same arguments that show distinctly the Jewish economy was altogether adverse to the purposes of a knavish priesthood, in the days of Moses, prove it would be so, in an equal degree, in the days of any other supposed ambitious, designing individual, whether civil or ecclesiastical.

Therefore, there can be no justifiable ground to refer the publication of the Pentateuch, the sole constitution and law of the Jewish people, to any other individual than him to whom the unvarying tradition of the nation alone refers as its author.

The reader who remembers the observation made at the commencement of this chapter, that I would extract and analyse every transaction in which the priesthood were concerned as recorded in the historical books of Scripture, after the times of Moses and Joshua, may possibly be surprised to find the instances so few in

number, and in none admitting of any imputation of selfish or improper motives, whether as existed towards the civil government of the land, or of knavery and imposture as exercised towards the people.

But, perhaps the reader may be more surprised that he has not seen, under the preceding notices of transactions in which the priesthood were concerned, any account of a miracle having been performed by the priesthood, unless the leprosy of king Uzziah be so considered, and but one miraculous message having been communicated to a priest, (Zachariah, son of Jehoiada,) in all the recorded history of the nation as set forth in the Bible. We exclude the instances concerning judgments by Urim and Thummim, and as being official acts which were exercised under the requirement of the civil ruler, and which we have faithfully enumerated in our preceding analysis in the chronological order in which they occurred.

But though we do not find the agency of the priesthood implicated as above stated, in the performance of miracles, or in communicating messages, as if from Jehovah to the nation, yet it is abundantly familiar to every one acquainted with the Bible, that during this very same period of time, numerous miracles were performed, and numerous revelations made, as if from Jehovah to the Jewish people. By what class of persons, then, were these supernatural agencies accomplished or communicated?

Is it not very strange that simple laymen, wholly unconnected with the church establishment, were the individuals who exhibited these most brilliant and imposing actions recorded in Jewish history? Yet such is the fact, the numerous prophets of God whose wonderful agencies constitute so great a portion of the Scripture writings, were, as far as we can ascertain their history, with the exception of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, all laymen.

This very remarkable fact consummates the full absurdity of the hypothesis, that conjectures the Bible to have been the composition of priestly knaves and impostors, for in addition to the absurdity which we have manifestly shown attends such a theory by our previous exhibitions, we must now add the crowning absurdity, that the supposed knavish priests of the Jewish system should have withheld from their order, the honor of performing miracles, of communicating the messages of Jehovah, and should have attributed them most abundantly to the prophets, who, with but two exceptions, were all laymen, and from whose mouth the priesthood were instructed, warned, and reproved.

I, therefore, should suppose it impossible that any one in the pos-

session of his senses, and at all regarding the value of human experience in such matters, can believe the Bible to have been a forgery by knavish priests. Then what men were they that were guilty of the imposture, and for what purpose was the fraud devised? The deists and sceptics have never advanced any other opinion than that the priesthood contrived the system, for their own selfish purposes. Our preceding analysis is, however, amply sufficient to disprove the supposition of any agency of knavish or ambitious priests on the subject, and this being rendered clear, I presume the integrity and veracity of the Scripture writers must be established to the satisfaction of any honest man, desirous of knowing the truth.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE PROPHETS.

FROM the concluding passages of our last chapter, it is evidently a matter of the greatest importance that we ascertain the true character of the scripture prophets. This we can accomplish by regarding the nature of their official functions, their actual condition in the Jewish nation, and what was their temporal interest. A thorough scrutiny into these particulars, will not only throw a vast light upon the moral constitution of the Jewish church, but will give us further assurance as to the credibility of the fact, that God did commission Moses to lay the foundations of the Christian religion.

It is a serious impediment to our general disquisition, that we are continually obliged to defer applying an argument, until we have previously informed the reader of the condition of things, upon which the force of the argument itself depends. But the necessity of such digressions is unavoidable. A sufficient knowledge of many of those particulars implicated in the biblical writings, is not a part of the literary attainments of general readers, and the subject itself is embarrassed, frequently, with perplexities concerning local matters, pertaining to a people who differed widely from us in their habits and institutions, whose history is thrown back in time several thousand years, and is further related only in dead languages. Such a statement as this not only implies necessarily many difficult considerations to the general reader, but also that particular circumstances may exist, which are but imperfectly comprehended even by those who have made such subjects matters of special study and examination.

Among those subjects of which the Christian world in general have a very uncertain, if not an improper opinion, is the character of those persons designated in the Scriptures by the term prophets, and which it is necessary we should put in a much clearer light, than the one in which they are regarded by the more ordinary readers of the Scripture.

By the word prophet, men commonly understand an individual who announces a communication from God, and in an especial manner, one who reveals future things, whether of a greater or less remoteness in time.

But the term is used in the Scriptures in a sense very wide of this general apprehension. Thus Abraham, Isaac, &c., are called prophets. The preachers of the Gospel are called prophets, and are largely exhibited in this light by St. Paul. (1 Corinth. xiv. 1 to 6 &c. ad finem.) He also calls a heathen moral poet a prophet. (Titus i. 12.) We further read of the prophets of Baal, &c.

By a careful examination of the meaning of the term, in the various passages of the Bible, we shall learn, that the word prophet, legitimately implies any person who proclaims or teaches the religious doctrines, pertaining to the worship of any deity whatever, though it be done without any pretensions of being inspired. In its proper signification, every one, whether layman or clergyman, that publicly proclaims or vindicates the truth of Christianity is a prophet *ipso facto*.

In the ancient times of Jewish history, there were persons always to be found, who appreciating the importance of faithfully serving Jehovah, strenuously urged their fellow citizens to a reverential obedience of his commandments, and who announced the consequences of an irreligious or immoral conduct. Though they laid no claim to an inspired authority, they were, nevertheless, prophets.

But from time to time Jehovah did hold spiritual communications with particular individuals, of this religious class of persons, who then, as being especially under divine influences, became in a more eminent degree prophets, or proclaimers of the existence and providence of God, and more zealously urged men to obey and serve him, such were Isaiah, Daniel, &c.

In process of time, the term prophet has been appropriated alone to those individuals who were inspired, and especially so, when they foretold any future event. A similar change has taken place with the word *saint*, which, in the apostolic writings, was applied to all sincere professors of Christianity: at present, it is applied only to those who have been canonized by the church.

By the preceding exposition, it will be easy to comprehend the nature and position of the different persons called prophets in the Old Testament, and who, as they are mentioned under circumstances sometimes very contradictory to the ordinary conception of their character, embarrass the reader, and render a very simple occurrence at times almost unintelligible.

This view will also enable us to understand distinctly the position of those persons among the Jews who are said, in the Old Testament, to "prophecy falsely," but who are never, to my recollection

in any place, called *false prophets*, and which I would explain in this manner: In the number of persons considered under the general term prophets, were some who were weak, some injudicious, some enthusiastic, and some, no doubt, were hypocrites; each of whom, according to their tempers and understandings, acted consistently with weakness, misjudgment, with enthusiasm, and with hypocrisy; special instances of such persons perhaps might be exhibited by a careful examination of Scripture. But as this would answer no immediate benefit to our scrutiny, we shall only use the statement made, to remark, that we do not consider, that all of those persons who acted in opposition to the really inspired prophets of God, were knaves and hypocrites, as some were, undoubtedly, but that, in many instances, they were simply presumptuous individuals, who undertook, on various occasions, to proclaim to the people, from their self-sufficient notions, what God would do, or would not do; just as at present, we sometimes hear a shallow, presumptuous clergyman expound to his congregation erroneous doctrines with as much dogmatism, as if he himself had been of the very councils of God. Such persons, in the language of the Old Testament Scripture, would be said to prophecy falsely.

I trust the preceding view will enable the reader to appreciate the general history of the prophets, according to the various circumstances under which we find them exhibited in the Scripture writings. The material point of which, is this, that any one who-soever that, in a zealous manner, urged obedience to the Law of God, was a prophet, though he made no pretension to inspiration;* but that those individuals of this general body, who were favored by the manifest influences of God's Spirit, were prophets in a more eminent degree. Such were those whose writings are embodied in canonical Scripture under that term, and of whom we are now about to discourse at large.

Though it may be said there was a succession of inspired prophets among the Jewish people, yet they were not necessarily connected with, or consequent to each other. At times there was but one individual claiming this high commission, at other times there may have been several; and again, there were times when there were none such avowedly in the land. They were, in fact, special ministers of God, dependent upon him for the communications they

* This view gives us a rational explanation of those associations or communities termed "schools of the prophets." If we remember that the term prophet was applied to any religious teacher, the subject is immediately intelligible, whereas under the ordinary notion that prophet also implied *inspiration*, the subject is incomprehensible.

were to make, and when not under his especial influences, were in the common condition of other pious individuals.

In the exercise of their various commissions as detailed in the Scriptures, we find them engaged in the following particulars:

1st. They conveyed special messages, commands, or appointments of God to various individuals.

2d. They reproved the people at large for national sins.

3d. They reproved and censured, in the most unequivocal language, the irreligious or immoral conduct of priests, kings, and rulers, both generally and individually.

4th. They exhorted all classes and orders of men with earnestness and affection, to act according to the strict requirements of the law of Moses, and promised them, in the name of Jehovah, blessings if obedient.

5th. They threatened every one, whether king, priest, or people, with the judgments of God if they persisted in any irreligious or immoral conduct. But in their threats of punishment they did not commonly speak in general terms, but foretold the particular punishment which Jehovah would surely bring on them.

6th. And, as an eminent act of their functions, they announced that Jehovah had great purposes in train towards establishing a kingdom on the earth, in which all the human family should be comprehended under the rule and dominion of a great personage, commonly designated among the Jews by the appellation of the Messiah.

It is hardly necessary for us to remind the reader that there was no formal recognition of the inspired prophets, as official persons, under the constitutional enactments of the Jewish nation. Jehovah had, indeed, declared that such persons should be sent by him, but they were not to be recognized by the people as his messengers, until they had clear evidence of their supernatural commission, by foretelling future events, or exhibiting a sign such as Deity alone could enable them to perform. See pages 139, 159.

The most remarkable feature in the history of the inspired prophets, is the fact, that of all those whose writings are preserved in the Bible, Jeremiah and Ezekiel alone, were of the priestly order; all the others being simple laymen, as far as we can ascertain the fact.

This very remarkable circumstance, gives rise to many views of immense importance towards appreciating the actual truth of the Mosaical dispensation; for by the history of the Bible, and the prophetic writings, we ascertain the important fact, that there exist-

ed at all times, or with small intervals between them, during the continuance of the Jewish state, until about four hundred years before Christ, a series of individuals who claimed divine inspiration, and who were, nevertheless, wholly unconnected with the Jewish ecclesiastical establishment. This class of men, as they performed the most brilliant actions related in the Bible, and made known all the communications of Jehovah; so, in those facts, they must be regarded as affording a most important mean to ascertain the true foundation of the priesthood, for with the ecclesiastical function, it is evident, the prophets seem to interfere very remarkably.

That the reader may fairly commence the present scrutiny, we must remind him that all the enactments regulating the Jewish Church, were made in the days of Moses, and that after his time, until the advent, nothing was ever added or subtracted from that establishment by any asserted divine authority. Hence, from its original constitution by Moses, the Jewish church was at all times, fully and divinely constituted, to make general or special atonement for every sin and transgression whatever. The functions of the priests, their sacrifices, and even their vestments, had been all appointed by law, under the sanction of God himself. Apparently, therefore, there existed no necessity for any further supernatural communication on religious subjects, and hence it would seem, according to a common judgment on the facts, that the office of prophet in its inspired function, was altogether superogatory, unless it was indeed collusive with a knavish priesthood, who might thus, from time to time, inflame the public superstition with the exhibition of miracles, in order to establish or confirm their authority over the nation.

We shall, however, be enabled with very little trouble, to vindicate the prophets from any charge of collusion with the priesthood, as also of ascertaining their real character, by appreciating the following circumstances.

By the institutions of Moses, the tribe of Levi was set apart for the performance of ecclesiastical duties, and the family of Aaron alone supplied the members of the priesthood. To this tribe and family, therefore, alone belonged all the honors, and all the temporalities, that Moses appointed for ecclesiastical purposes. Every other tribe was expressly excluded from any participation in the duties or privileges of the Levitical body.

But for the inspired prophets, who were, with but two exceptions, all laymen, there was no provision made of any kind whatsoever. They received no tithe, nor any other support; neither did

their spiritual commission give them any *ex-officio* dignity in the nation. They were, for the most part, retired in their habits of life, and often uncouth in their dress and manners. But, on these particulars, we cannot enter into details, for the prophets were of every class and condition of men, from the king to the husbandmen, and sometimes female, as well as male.

But though the prophets always urged the nation, in the most earnest manner, to a strict observance of the institutions of Moses, yet it is abundantly evident, they could not have formed any party with the priesthood; for not only have they entirely abstained from commending the order;* but their writings are full of censures and denunciations against them, for transgressing the laws of Jehovah, and for failing in their moral duties towards the nation at large. It is hardly necessary to remark, that Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the only two prophets taken from the priestly tribe, are as distinguished for their censures of the priesthood, as much as any other prophets.

From this brief, though I should trust, sufficient view, it must appear impossible, that there could be any collusion between the prophets and the priesthood; as not only is there wanting any circumstance whatever, to justify such a suspicion, but in reality, the prophets occupied a much higher ground in the divine economy, than the priesthood, for it was they alone who performed miracles; prophesied of futurity, and maintained, as was asserted, supernatural communications with Jehovah,—honors which the priesthood never claimed.

Having thus exhibited the inspired prophets to stand upon the peculiarity of their individual functions, and altogether unimpeachable from any suspicious contingency of human interest in matters of wealth, of honor, or of official dignities, connected with Jewish society, and having, also, distinctly shown, that it is absurd to suppose that they could be leagued with a priesthood, whom they never commend, and continually censure in the most emphatic manner, we shall now proceed to show the absolute integrity of the prophets, in those particulars of their function, that brought them into contact with the civil governors of the land. For in the execution of their asserted divine commission, they stood before kings and rulers, as bringing them messages from God, either approving or condemning them, according to their particular conduct.

*I think there are but three individual priests, that are commended in the prophetical writings. If there should be other instances, I have unintentionally overlooked them. The passages, I allude to above; are, Isaiah xxii. 20 &c. Haggai ii. 2. Zechariah iii. 1. &c. vi. 11.

As it would occupy too much space to exhibit all these instances in detail, we shall speak of them summarily, according to the three following conclusions, derived from a careful examination of the biblical writings.

1st. In every instance where a king or ruler is censured, it was for having disregarded the institutions of Moses: such as adopting idolatrous practices, as having been guilty of certain breaches of morality, &c.

2d. In every instance where a king or ruler is commended, it was for conforming to the law of Moses, removal of idolatry, &c.

3d. And in no instance whatever, was king or ruler condemned or applauded for his conduct to a prophet, in the first place, or towards the priesthood, in the second.

The reader who may feel interest enough in this subject to examine the Scripture, in order to ascertain the correctness of our preceding assertions, need only read straight onwards, during the continuance of the undivided kingdom of the Jewish people, to be convinced of the absolute integrity of the prophets, in every relation there made. But after the decease of Solomon, we have a condition of things so very favorable for appreciating the political and religious integrity of the prophets, that we must request the reader to pursue their history after that time, under the guidance of the following exhibition of facts.

Though the kingdom of Israel, who revolted from Rehoboam the son of Solomon, in great measure rejected the institutions of Moses, and especially those matters that concerned the sacerdotal order, yet they were not without a regular ministration of prophets, who continually testified against the irreligion and wickedness of both kings and people. Revelations, as if from God, were continually made, and miracles were repeatedly exhibited by the prophets to this perverse people. Yet during the ministration of the prophets, throughout the whole continuance of the kingdom of Israel, or for two hundred and sixty-eight years, they never in a single instance called on the people to return to their allegiance, to the house of David. But they strenuously urged them to repent of their idolatry and vices, that they should turn their hearts to God, and do those things that are commanded in the books of Moses.

By such facts as these, it is incredible that the prophets, who appeared in the kingdom of Israel, were influenced either by political views of their own, or by those that might be supposed to interest the monarchs of the kingdom of Judah. And this is further evident by the proceeding of these prophets who exercised their

functions in the kingdom of Judah. For there, in perfect accordance of language and spirit, with those living in Israel, the prophets continually reproached and denounced the kings, priests, and people of Judah, calling on them, in the very same language, to repent of their irreligious and vicious practices, to turn their hearts to God, and obey the commandment of Moses.

It therefore seems to me, that nothing can be more distinctly exhibited than the fact of the personal integrity of the inspired prophets of Old Testament history. We have considered them in their singular position, as respected the priesthood; we have estimated their proceedings as connected with the politics of the Jewish people, and in every light, in which they can be examined, we are unable to discern any circumstance, whatever, that can impeach their testimony, whether, as it concerns their own functions, or as exhibiting the fact, that the Jewish church was of divine constitution and appointment.

Let us now exhibit, distinctly, the value of the testimony of the prophets on this latter subject.

It is impossible to produce a single passage in the prophetic writings, in which a word is spoken against the office, honors, or subsistence of the Jewish priests, but against their personal corruptions or immoralities, the passages are numerous, and in the most emphatic terms of condemnation.

As the prophets strenuously urged the strict observance of all the commandments of Moses, and as they never claimed, in the remotest degree, any enjoyment of power or revenue for themselves, it is impossible they can be charged with any *party hostility* to the priestly order. On the contrary, by upholding the Mosaic institutions in all their integrity, they must be considered the direct defenders of the hierarchy, in all their particular privileges, as there appointed. If the priests were impostors, the prophets might, from their strong language, urging the observance of the Mosaic institutions, be, at first sight, considered the agents or partizans of the priesthood: but it is impossible that any rational man can remain of that opinion, when it is found, that the prophets, openly and unhesitatingly, under the asserted authority of Jehovah himself, continually censure the priesthood for their corruptions and sins, and have not, in a single passage, commended the value or importance of their order.*

*Collins, the deist, was so much struck with the amount of censure cast by the prophets upon the priesthood, that he terms them *free thinkers*; not discerning that though the prophets censured the irreligion or the immorality of the priests, when they had thus transgressed, yet they universally sustained the institutions of Moses, in the most urgent manner, as being constitutions

Here then, are two facts, which it is impossible to reconcile together, if we suppose the priesthood to have advocated a system of imposture, but all is perfectly intelligible, when we state that the institutions of Moses were of divine appointment, though the priests *personally*, more or less, at various times, like other men, had become irreligious. The prophets, inspired by the same God who had revealed himself to Moses, speak not against the office of the priests, or against their functions, but against the corruptions and evil practices of the priests, *personally*.

Any theory charging the institutions of Moses, as the contrivance of an impostor, that does not harmoniously reconcile the history of the priests and the prophets, as exhibited in the Bible, must be, *ipso facto*, absurd.

As I apprehend, I have now sufficiently scrutinized the ecclesiastical constitutions of Moses, I propose, in this place, to close our examination on that subject, for I cannot but consider, we have exhibited an amount of evidence, sufficient to satisfy any reasonable man, that it is altogether incredible, that the Old Testament writings can be the contrivance of an ecclesiastical fraud.

To attain this result, we have scrutinized the institutions themselves, and the ecclesiastical appointments of the priesthood, by the closest attention to those principles of human action, by which mankind are most influenced, by which human integrity is most tempted, and in which, every other priesthood has universally failed, according to the experience of all past ages.

But notwithstanding the closest scrutiny, upon the admitted suspicion that they might have been impostors, we have, nevertheless, been unable to find one single passage, by which we can mistrust the integrity of those persons, who founded the Jewish state, or those who have given us its history, and scheme of religion, in the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

If to this actual amount of evidence, we further add, that the morality of the system itself, whether as estimated in its influences upon the consciences of individuals, or upon the well being of society at large, positively embraces every principle and motive to moral

of Jehovah. However, the notion of this writer is important, for even his superficial examination of the prophetic writings, was sufficient to show him, there could be no collusion between the prophets and the priesthood. His observation, which I can only quote at second hand, is from Leland's *View of Deistical Writers*, i. 122. "Collins, speaking of the prophets, says, 'they were great *free thinkers*, and that they write with as great liberty against the established religion of the Jews, (which the people looked on as the institution of God himself,) as if they looked upon it all to be imposture.'"

conduct, that human wisdom has been able to discern in the universal history of our race; how can any one, after such an exposition, hesitate to admit, that the religious system, as taught in the Scriptures, as far as the honesty and integrity of the biblical writers is concerned, is wholly and absolutely free from any imputation of ecclesiastical fraud or contrivance.

But in thus proving the Scriptures not to have been an ecclesiastical fraud and imposture, we prove them to be a true history of a divine revelation, for in all the multitude of imputations cast upon their claim of being the writings of men acting under the influences of Jehovah, no infidel, or deist, has ever charged their composition to any other persons than a knavish priesthood. But I trust we have sufficiently proved, that it is both incredible and absurd to the last degree, to suppose a knavish priesthood could have composed these books.

If then a knavish priesthood positively did not compose or dictate the books of the Old Testament, what other class of knaves and impostors could have executed them? I think we have also sufficiently proved, that they could not have been dictated by political ambition, for the system itself is as positively hostile to any such scheme, as it is to the imputation of being a scheme of religious imposture.

Hence there is no possibility for any honest mind to escape the direct conclusion, that, as the moral integrity and disinterestedness of the biblical writers of the Old Testament, is wholly free from any sinister imputation, so their record and history, whether of sacred or natural things, is substantially true, *i. e.* these books can only be erroneous through accident or inadvertence, in matters and particulars, to be corrected by a judicious criticism, which may, in some places, strike out, in others, insert more correct readings, or otherwise remedy the various accidents to which these ancient writings have been exposed. Nor let the Christian reader imagine, that in thus admitting the existence of errors in our copies of the Scripture, that our faith in their accuracy as communicating divine truth, will be disturbed to the least degree, for as long as we can affirm them to be absolutely free from any imputation of selfish or interested exposition, to the benefit of any particular class of human beings, we may rest fully assured, that the reverence in which they have ever been held, has prevented any error or inaccuracy, which collation of manuscripts, and rational criticism cannot remedy.

Hitherto the object of our discourse has been, to show what the Jewish priesthood were not, but having now sufficiently exhibited them under that head, there is an evident propriety, that we should

before we terminate our disquisition on this remarkable body of men, state what was their real position in the church, according to the appointments of Moses, which we cannot too often reiterate, were sanctioned by Jehovah himself.

The only true and important function of the Jewish priesthood, was in offering the sacrifices that Jehovah had appointed, whether for the sins of the nation, or for the expiation of individual penitents.

All their other functions and exercises were but contingent, and arose upon the theory that they were a pure and holy body of men engaged continually in religious service before the immediate presence of Jehovah, of which the Schekinah was a symbolical exhibition. As such, they were judges of personal defilements, the administration of the waters of jealousy, &c. The blessing the people in the name of the Lord on the appointed festivals, was also a stated part of their duties, but not one that they had any power to bestow or dispense with at their pleasure.

Therefore the true official position of the priesthood was alone within the boundaries of the temple, or of those consecrated places where the ark was deposited before the building of the temple, and it was only on the occurrence of accidental circumstances, that they were called on, officially, to leave the precincts of the holy places.

Though there are a few passages in the Scriptures that seem to imply the priesthood should instruct the laity, yet I apprehend those passages only signify that the priest should rightly inform the people concerning those things which required the co-operation of the priest with the act of the layman, such as in offering a sacrifice, or even as to the significance and right administration of circumcision, the passover, &c.

But that the priesthood ever administered instruction to the people in a general manner, such as is done by our preachers of the gospel, can hardly be affirmed. On the contrary, as far as we can infer any thing from the biblical writings, it would seem to be impossible they could have exercised any such function.*

In the first place, they certainly had no direct authority to teach the laity, and in case they ever did so, their instruction had no weight of official authority as being from the priesthood, for the law itself,

* There is a single passage in the Old Testament, (2 Chron. xvii. 7 to 10,) which states that Jehoshaphat sent a commission to certain great officers of his kingdom to teach the people the law of God, and which was probably effected by the priests and Levites, that he directed to accompany these commissioners. This transaction can only be considered a pious act of the king's devising, and not a duty pertaining to the priesthood, or officially exercised by them.

and the formal annunciation made by Moses on the promulgation of the law to the people at large, authorized every individual to determine the obligations of the law for himself. This subject the reader may remember we exhibited in its remarkable peculiarity, at page 158, when we attempted to show the significance of the phrase, "It is not in heaven."

Though the Jewish people are continually reproached in the Bible for not obeying the recommendations of the prophets, I am unaware of a single passage that reproaches them for having been disobedient to the teaching or instructions of the priesthood.

I apprehend we shall arrive at the same result, by considering the constitution of the Jewish synagogues. Here the services of the priesthood were never required, but elders, mere *laymen*, selected by the congregation themselves, prayed, read the law, expounded it to the audience, and exhorted them to an obedience of its requirements. Though these elders had no authority whatever, beyond what the people may have conceded to their learning or piety, yet we find they did possess great influence with the nation, and taught many false doctrines which were censured by our Saviour.

Our Saviour remarks expressly, that the Scribes and the Pharisees sat in Moses's seat, *i. e.* it was they who interpreted the law, but he says nothing of the priesthood either as possessing, or as exercising such power. He continually upbraids the Scribes and Pharisees with their false doctrines and erroneous teaching, but there is not a single passage in the New Testament in which any false doctrine is attributed to the teaching of the priesthood.

But as I cannot go into any antiquarian investigation of this matter, I alone base my view of the priesthood in the special exhibitions of the Pentateuch. As there detailed, most certainly their peculiar function was to burn incense before God, and to make the sacrifices required by the law. This was their important and sacred duty, and by which they made, and alone made, expiation for sin, whether individual or national. Their other functions were too accidental and too unimportant to embarrass us, in any manner, as to their actual and true official position, as being the medium alone through which sin was expiated.

In all other matters the Jewish priesthood had either none, or a very limited importance, and most certainly had nothing to do with the great purposes of Jehovah towards preparing for the future establishment of Christianity, unless their mere typical function be so considered. Every annunciation of the Messiah, and every communication of God's future purposes with regard to his kingdom,

and every particular connected with that subject, was alone promulgated by the prophets. The priesthood stood always in the same position that had been assigned them by Moses, and they fell with the temple and its peculiar service. The ministration of the particulars concerning the Messiah, as exercised by the prophets, increased in brightness with every successive age until it shone forth into perfect day.

These particulars concerning the priesthood are, in themselves, of importance, and we trust the reader will not forget them, as we may have to make a very important application of them in a future page.

Though I have now terminated our discourse upon the divine constitution of the Jewish church, as involved in the history of the priesthood, we shall not close this chapter at the present time, not only because I deem it improper to make any formal distinction between Judaism and Christianity, but also because I have not yet touched upon that subject so largely contemplated in the Mosaical dispensation, and so largely announced by the prophets, concerning the future advent of the Messiah, and the establishment of his moral domination over the nations of the earth.

Standing, therefore, as the prophets do upon the foundations of the Jewish church, we cannot, with any propriety, close this chapter until we have exhibited with all distinctness, the theory of that important subject, whose future procession they regarded with such boundless emotions, and which it was the high prerogative of their office to announce to mankind.

Notwithstanding the religious glory of the Jewish church in its divine constitution, the numerous miracles accomplished by its prophets and the special providence with which Jehovah continually governed their affairs, whether secular or ecclesiastic, and notwithstanding that justifiable prejudice with which the Old Testament Jews regarded themselves, as a nation that Jehovah had chosen before all other nations of men—yet nothing was more distinctly admitted among them, than that there should, in a remote period of time, arise a condition of things under the good providence of Jehovah, which should be infinitely superior, both in glory and prosperity, to the happiest times they had ever witnessed under the Mosaic economy.

From the earliest ages of Jewish history, a belief prevailed among that people, under the authority of divine revelation, that a glorious personage should arise among them, who would eventually establish a most gracious dominion over all the nations of the earth. How-

ever determinate their belief might be, as to the commencement of its auspicious influence upon their own nation, it was equally a part of their theory, that ultimately all mankind should be included in its advantages and blessings.

The coming of this extraordinary personage, known among the Jews by the title of the Messiah, constitutes a prominent theme with all those Jewish prophets whose writings have reached our times, and it is impossible for the reader not to be struck with the remarkable changes in the style of the prophetic writers, whenever they touch on this particular subject. In their addresses to the Jewish people, or to their kings or priests, they are, at various times, and according to their constitutional temperament, either indignant in their censure, warm and affectionate in their entreaties, calm, though importunate, when reasoning with them on the folly and perverseness of their conduct: but should they happen to touch upon any subject that leads to a consideration of the Messiah's kingdom, the prophet seems to forget the theme then before him, and in exulting anticipation dwells on the glory of that auspicious reign. These glowing anticipations of future time, strike us with the greater force, as being contrasted with the troublous times, and calamities announced as impending over the mighty kingdoms of the ancient world, the prophesied desolation of Judea and Jerusalem, the captivity and oppression of the people. In the midst of these melancholy annunciations, the prophets continually burst forth with the consolatory statement, that these evils and calamities shall ultimately cease, and that with the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, universal blessedness and peace shall prevail; that all crime and wickedness shall cease; sorrow and sighing shall be heard no more; death itself shall be destroyed; and that the righteous shall dwell in the light and presence of Jehovah, unsusceptible of change for ever more.

“Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders, but thou shalt call thy walls salvation and thy gates praise.

The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.

Thy sun shall no more go down: neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.” Isaiah lx. 18, &c.

The theory of the Messiah's universal kingdom, its boundless blessings, and the extraordinary contingencies that should occur whilst it progressed to its perfect establishment among the nations

of the earth, make this subject an invaluable test by which the inspiration of the biblical writings may be exhibited.

According to the Scripture, the doctrine concerning the Messiah was promulgated to the original parents of mankind. These, through the temptation of an evil spirit, having broken the commandment of Jehovah, incurred the penalty of temporal death, as the punishment of their disobedience. Yet at the time of the fall, Jehovah promised them a triumph over their spiritual adversary, through one of their own posterity, and to whom, in after ages, the title of "the Messiah" was appropriated.

This promise, therefore, as recorded in the Scriptures, belongs not to the Jews, but to the whole human race, as being the posterity of those individuals who received the promise. And though Jehovah assured Abraham and other patriarchs of the Jews, that the Messiah should be produced from them, and in their direct descendants, yet in every promise made to such individuals, it is expressly announced, conformably to the original appointment, that the advent of this great personage, should be *for the blessedness of all the nations of the earth.*

In after ages, when Jehovah alone sent his prophets to the Jewish people, any further revelation on this subject was necessarily confined to those who heard or read their communications. It is, therefore, alone in the books pertaining to the Jewish church, that we are able to discern, with distinctness, what especial matters were contemplated by Jehovah for the benefit of the human race, at a time when all nations, except the Jews, had fallen into the grossest idolatry.*

This prophesied blessedness of the whole human race, it is impossible that any sane mind can attribute to a scheme of knavish imposture, either on the part of the prophets or ecclesiastics. For it is inconceivable that the Jews, whose rational pride it was to

*But however gross and depraved the heathen nations gradually became, yet they never lost sight altogether of the primitive doctrine concerning the advent of the Messiah. The mystic death and revivification of Osiris, of Thamus or Adonis, and of Bacchus, among the more ancient nations; of Balder, among the Scandinavians; of the son of the king of heaven, among the Tartars; of Purusha, among the Hindoos; the communion of the Mexicans, of the people of Guatimala, of the Peruvians, &c., have all so strong a reference to the life or death of our Redeemer, that it is impossible we can attribute any other origin to these extraordinary mythological institutions, but to traditions derived from the common parents of the human race. See on these subjects Bryant and others, but especially various works of the Reverend Mr. Faber. I have also briefly exhibited this subject in the Appendix to my Philos. and Antiq. Researches on America, and have added some particulars unknown to previous writers on the subject.

consider themselves Jehovah's peculiar and only people, should, in opposition to the essential principle of that pride and exultation, invent and promulgate the doctrine, that there was a time coming, when all the heathen should be called into the joyful prosperity of the Messiah's kingdom.

That it is utterly impossible any selfish or domineering scheme could be meditated under such an extraordinary promulgation, must be very evident by the fact, that the prophets have distinctly intimated that the Jews should, in the first instance, reject the Messiah, and that the Gentiles should receive him. In consequence of which, the prophets have informed us, that the conversion of the Gentiles from their idolatry, would be the first fruits of the Messiah's advent, and as such, they should receive the first blessedness of his kingdom. It was expressly foretold, that the Jews themselves should not participate in that prosperity, until they had endured a long and grievous exile from their country, with all the additions of a cruel and oppressive servitude.

Surely no other proof ought to be required to convince any honest mind, that the theory of the Messiah is wholly free from any imputation of being the suggestion or contrivance of Jewish knaves or impostors. For it not only disregarded all national views of bigotry or patriotism, in thus anticipating the universal happiness of the heathen nations, but all incredulity must be overpowered when it is distinctly implied, that they themselves should forfeit the favor and protection of Jehovah, at the very time that the Gentiles should be accepted and blessed of him, to the consummation of time.

As it would be useless to merely refer the common class of readers to those passages, in which these remarkable particulars are announced, I shall here introduce a number of extracts from the prophetical writings, which shall not only exhibit in a forcible manner, all these singular facts, so necessary for estimating the credibility of the old Jewish church, but also as involving the very foundation upon which Christianity has been built.

But in consequence of the length of the prophecies in many instances, I shall only quote their substance, wholly omitting the metaphorical language and figures with which they are delivered. In making these extracts, I shall alone use those that distinctly shadow forth the Messiah, omitting those that are now applied by accommodation. For as these last could not have been considered prophetical of the Messiah before the advent, so our present undertaking is especially confined to an exhibition of this subject, as it might be understood anterior to that time.

By this method of proceeding, we shall vindicate, not only the theory of the Messiah's kingdom upon the Jewish foundation, but we further shall be better able to comprehend the actual proceeding of the Jews at the advent of Jesus Christ. This circumstance is of great importance, and which has been very much misunderstood, by the error of supposing that all the prophecies, whether direct or accommodated, as we now understand them, were considered to be applicable to the Messiah before the advent. This notion is very incorrect, and has occasioned no small perplexity.

As I have, by our preceding arguments, vindicated the biblical writings of the Old Testament from every imputation of being the work of knaves and impostors, it must clearly follow that the several books, of which the Scriptures are composed, were written at the times, and by those individuals to whom they are described. If there be any difficulty in ascertaining certain particulars on these subjects, they are merely matters of criticism, that concern nothing of absolute truth.

But on the authority of the several points, which we have established in preceding pages, we shall now prefix chronological dates to the prophecies of the Old Testament, that foretold the coming of the Messiah, that we may exhibit the argument to be thence deduced in all the force to which it is entitled. But we shall, hereafter, sustain the argument derivable from the prophecies on this subject, by arguments independent of any previous discussion.

Chronological enumeration of Old Testament prophecies, concerning the Messiah.

First promise made by God to Adam, "that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head," at the same time announcing that *he* should be bruised in the heel Gen. iii. 15.

Promise to Abraham, B. C. 2078* that in his *seed all the families or nations of the earth should be blessed.* Gen. xii. 3, xxii. 18.

Promise to Isaac, B. C. 2000, that in his *seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.* Gen. xxvi. 4.

Promise to Jacob, B. C. 1916, that in *his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed.* Gen. xxviii. 14.

Jacob announces, B. C. 1846, that the sceptre of government should not depart from the tribe of Judah, until Shiloh, (the Mes-

*The chronological system I have followed is that of the Rev. Mr. Hales, as set forth by him in his *Analysis of Ancient Chronology, Geography, History, and Prophecy.*

siah,) should come, and that all nations should be gathered under his dominion. Gen. xlix. 10.

Moses announces, B. C. 1608, that Jehovah would raise up a PROPHET like himself, and that God would punish those who should disregard his teaching.

Moses announces, B. C. 1608, the advent of the Messiah in future judgment, according to the Septuagint, in Deut. xxxii. 43. This passage has been lost from the Hebrew text since that translation was made, and it is so abrupt in the Greek, that I cannot but suppose that some preceding verse or verses had been lost before that version was made.

David, king of Israel, who flourished about the year B. C. 1060, has left several remarkable prophecies concerning the Messiah in the book of Psalms, both direct and accommodated. The following are of the former kind:

Psalm ii. David here apostrophises a combination of the heathen and the Jews against the Messiah, but Jehovah holds them in derision, and promises his son, (the Messiah,) that he will give him the heathen and the uttermost parts of the earth for an inheritance. It is, then, announced that he should break all human political constitutions into pieces, as an earthen vessel is shivered by the blow of an iron bar.

Psalm xlv. David exhibits the Messiah as a king, advancing prosperous and triumphant because of his "truth and righteousness." He then addresses him in those remarkable words, "thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre," i. e. a sceptre of rectitude, synecdoche, for a righteous and just government.

Psalm lxxii. David predicts the dominion of the Messiah to the ends of the earth, the submission of all kings to him, and that all nations should serve him. He announces that the Messiah shall break in pieces the oppressor, and shall judge, with righteousness, the poor and the needy. That he shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence, and that their blood (lives) should be precious in his sight. "His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed."

Psalm cx. David here represents Jehovah as telling the Messiah to sit at his right hand until he should subdue his enemies; and then metaphorically exhibits the places of heathenism as filled with the bodies of the dead.

In this Psalm, Jehovah constitutes the Messiah a priest for ever, af-

ter the order of Melchizedeck; thereby implying that the priests who were constituted after the order of Aaron, were not to be a perpetual order. This circumstance is strongly urged in the epistle to Hebrews, chaps. v. to viii.

Isaiah, who flourished about the year B. C. 725, abounds in prophetic views of the Messiah's kingdom; I quote alone those that are direct in their application.

Isaiah, in chaps. ii. iii. iv. announces that "*in the last days,*" a phrase among the Jews, synonymous with the days of the Messiah, that the nations of the earth should rush, as it were, to the temple of Jehovah, at Jerusalem; for from thence should his law and his ordinances go forth to the ends of the earth; that the Messiah shall judge among the *nations*, (i. e. the Gentiles,) and that at his rebuke men should beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning knives. "*Nation shall no more fight against nation, neither shall there be war any more.*"

Before this blessed state shall be established, evils and desolations of the greatest kind shall befall Judea and Jerusalem, but ultimately, when the people should become purified, they should, with their city, be eminently exalted in the sight of the world.

Isaiah, chaps. viii. ix. predicts that a great intellectual darkness should overspread the land of Judea, and that suddenly the light and salvation of the Messiah should break forth "*in the land of Zebulon, and the land of Naphtali, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles.*" Here the Messiah is promised in very remarkable language.

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Father of the everlasting age, the Prince of Peace.*

Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this."

Then ensues a severe denunciation against Israel, which, I apprehend, prophetically anticipates the great wickedness of the Jewish people, at the time of our Redeemer's advent.

Isaiah, chap. xi. announces that the Messiah shall be of the stem of Jesse, (the father of David,) and that his kingdom should be established upon earth in unexampled righteousness and peace. Even

* This is the translation of Bishop Louth, which, though perhaps not altogether correct, is preferable to that of our common version.

the lion, the wolf, and the poisonous reptile shall become harmless and playful. The banner of the Messiah shall be displayed in the sight of all nations, and that to it *the Gentiles would flock*. After the establishment of this kingdom the Jewish people should be recovered from their dispersion among the nations of the earth.

The remaining portion of this prophecy seems to imply a judgment of God should take place upon certain Gentile nations, who shall, in the end, attempt to oppose the Jewish re-settlement of their ancient country.

Isaiah, chap xxxii. foretells great blessings in the righteous and merciful judgments of the Messiah, reigning as a king in the earth. But previously he declares that the land of Judea should be greatly afflicted, and the people suffer grievously, "until the Spirit be poured on them from on high."

Isaiah, chap. xxxv. An enraptured view, anticipating the unexampled happiness and peace of the Messiah's kingdom, and abounding with glowing metaphorical expressions. The chapter terminates with announcing the joyous return of the Jews from their captivity and exile.

Isaiah, xlii. Jehovah is represented as exhibiting the Messiah to the world as one in whom his soul delighted, and as one who should bring *judgment and light to the Gentiles*.

"He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law.

I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, *for a light to the Gentiles*;

To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."

Isaiah, chaps. xlix. l. li. The Messiah is exhibited as inviting *the Gentiles* to listen to him, and complains that the Jews had rejected him when he ought to have anticipated the most favorable reception from them. Jehovah is then represented as telling him that, though Israel had refused to be gathered under his government, that this rejection was a little thing as compared with the glory he should receive from *the Gentiles*, and as exhibiting the salvation of God to the ends of the earth.

After this merciful dispensation to the heathen; Zion is represented as mourning that Jehovah had forsaken her. Immediately he extends his merciful favor to her, and announces a glorious return from a state of terrible desolation and captivity.

Isaiah, chaps. lii. liii. announces the advent of the Messiah, and

then follows a most remarkable description of his person and ministry. He is exhibited as being despised and rejected of men, as a man of sorrow and of grief, that he was bruised and wounded for human transgression, and as seeming to be smitten of God. He is represented as being imprisoned, and of being put to death, and that his soul should be an offering for sin.

Nevertheless, Jehovah declares that the Messiah shall see the great blessings that shall follow his ministry, that he shall prolong his days, and be satisfied with the travail of his soul.

Micah, the prophet, who was cotemporary with Isaiah, chap. v. foretells that the Messiah should come forth, or be born at the village of Bethlehem, and that he should rule and govern in the strength and majesty of Jehovah, unto the ends of the earth.

The latter part of this prophecy announces a great judgment upon the heathen, but whether it is to be understood literally or metaphorically, I cannot pretend to determine.

Jeremiah, who lived B. C. 639, in chapter xxiii. communicates the promise of God concerning the Messiah, in the following terms:

“Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is his name, whereby he shall be called: **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”

Jeremiah, in chapter xxxiii. again recites this prophecy, in the same language and metaphors.

The prophet Daniel, who lived at Babylon during the seventy years’ captivity, began to prophecy about the year, B. C. 605.

In chapter ii. of his prophetical writing, is explained a vision of Nebuchadnezzar, in which the great monarchies or governments of the world are exhibited to us in their succession. After having announced the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman domination over the world, the prophet announces, that they should all pass away, and that Jehovah should establish a government, (that of the Messiah,) “which shall never be destroyed, but shall break in pieces, and consume all the preceding kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

Daniel, in chap. vii. records a vision of Jehovah to him, which again represents the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, and finally he exhibits the coming of the Messiah to his kingdom, in the following words:

“I saw in the night, visions, and behold one like the son of a man

came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, (Jehovah) and they brought him near, before him.

“And there was given him (the Messiah) dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him, his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

It was from this and the preceding prophecy, that John the Baptist and others took the phrase, of “the kingdom of heaven being at hand,” and “that the reign of the kingdom of heaven was about to begin.” They are expressions simply synonymous with saying, the Messiah was about to commence his reign.

Daniel, in chap. ix. communicates the most definite prophecy of the Scripture, concerning the time when the Messiah should come upon earth. It further informs us, that the Messiah “should be cut off,” and foretells the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem by the Romans. The following verses are too important to be epitomized. The angel who communicated with Daniel, thus informs him:

“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy, (i. e. the Messiah.)

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the prince, shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks, the street shall be built again, and the wall even in troublous times.

And after threescore and two weeks, shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself, and the people of the prince that shall come, (the Romans,) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

And he (Messiah) shall confirm the covenant with many for one week, and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations, he shall make it desolate, even unto the consummation, and that determined, shall be poured upon the desolate.”

The prophet Ezekiel, who was among the captives of Judea, carried to Babylon about the year B. C. 586, represents (chap. xxxiv.) Jehovah as promising the Messiah to the Jews under the symbolic name of David, and as communicating to them great peace and blessedness. In his day there shall be an entire removal of the

savage beasts of the forests, an abundant production of all the fruits of the earth, and an everlasting deliverance from the heathen, through the power of Jehovah.

Ezekiel, in chap. xxxvii. prophecies of the ultimate restoration of the Jewish people through the might and power of Jehovah. He promises them a great deliverance, and that the Messiah here also symbolized under the name of David, shall be king over them and their prince for ever. The heathen also shall see that Jehovah has sanctified Israel, in the establishment of his tabernacle among them for evermore.

The prophet Haggai, performed the functions of his ministry, during those times immediately consequent to the return from the Babylonian captivity, or about the year B. C. 535. His prophecy is very important, as limiting the time of the Messiah's advent to the duration of the second temple, afterwards destroyed by the Romans. This prophecy, since that destruction, is an insurmountable objection to the hypothesis of the Jews that the Messiah is yet to come.

The prophecy of Haggai is as follows: chap. ii. 6 to 9.

"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;

And I will shake all nations, and the DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS (the Messiah) shall come, and I will fill *this house* with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts.

The glory of *this house* shall be greater than of the former, (i. e. the splendid temple of Solomon,) saith the Lord of Hosts, and in this place, *will I give peace*, saith the Lord of Hosts."

The prophet Zachariah, who lived about the same time with Haggai, announces that the Messiah should come to the Jewish people in a very humble state, notwithstanding his glorious attributes.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout O daughter of Jerusalem, behold thy king (the Messiah) cometh unto thee, he is just, and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass."

And I (Jehovah) will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off. And he (the Messiah) *shall speak peace unto the heathen*, and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river (Euphrates) even to the ends of the earth."

Malachi, the last of the prophets of the Old Testament, is supposed to have written his prophesy about the year B. C. 420.

In chap. iii. he announces the Messiah under the appellation of the "Messenger of the Covenant," and that he should suddenly come to the temple, and that the Jewish church should be subjected to a most searching scrutiny and purification.

"But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth, for he is like a refiner's fire, and like the fuller's soap."

Malachi, in the fourth chapter, further announces a day of great calamity and judgment shall fall upon the nation, but that deliverance shall be extended to such as fear the name of Jehovah, and that they shall be made to triumph over the wicked. Jehovah further promises to send Elijah, the prophet, to convert the hearts of men, lest on the coming of his great day, he find the world so corrupted, that he shall be induced to smite the whole earth with a curse.

Such are the leading prophecies of the Scriptures concerning the advent of the Messiah, and the eminently glorious and peaceful dominion, that he should establish among the nations of the earth.

But the reader must not, at the present stage of our exhibition, regard these prophecies as a Christian, well instructed in their fulfilment, he must endeavor to realise to himself, what conclusion he would have made from them, had he lived before the manifestation of Jesus Christ.

From the metaphorical language used in conveying these prophetic announcements, I apprehend no one would have been able to anticipate more than a very general result, the substance of which would have been, that the Messiah at one time triumphant, at another humiliated, should ultimately prevail over all his enemies, and establish a government upon the earth, abounding in universal peace and blessedness. In this happy condition of things, the Gentiles should all be participators, and that the universal worship of Jehovah should prevail throughout the globe. That war, and all its desolations, should cease, and that every evil and oppression among the children of men, should be removed for ever.

The language of the prophecies is very general, and very little restricted, as to any literal fulfilment, except the vision of Daniel concerning *the seventy weeks*, there is scarcely another prophecy that is not more or less undetermined as to time, and that is not further susceptible either of literal or of metaphorical fulfilment. The prophecies also cover an immense lapse of time in the process of their fulfilment; for I apprehend that most of them extend into the future life, though they commenced with the literal advent of the Redeemer.

In short, it seems to me, that all a religious Jew ought to have anticipated from the prophecies, would have been, that Jehovah had made a great preparation for the peace and happiness of mankind, through the instrumentality of the Messiah, but that the means by which it should be ultimately accomplished, were altogether incomprehensible. And though the prophets so distinctly foretel that the Jews would reject the Messiah, and that the Gentiles should be taken first into covenant with him, I apprehend it would be altogether impossible for any Jew, anterior to the advent, to have appreciated that circumstance.

But let us now ask, to what selfish end or purpose, this great machinery, announcing the Messiah, with which every Jewish prophet has largely concerned himself, could be possibly directed? Was it to accomplish any great political scheme? Was it to encourage the nation to mighty efforts in wars of conquest and ambition? Or to what end could it be directed?—I know not what the wildness of conjecture may suggest, but this much is abundantly clear: the Jewish nation had underwent six servitudes from surrounding nations. Their monarchy had been divided into two hostile governments, repeatedly engaged in mutual desolations. The kings of Assyria and Babylon carried away into captivity their respective people, and after the return of Judah from Babylon, the oppressive hand of Greek and Roman had fallen on them; and yet, during all these political afflictions, neither priest, nor king, had ever attempted the least application of the prefigured Messiah to excite the national prejudices of the people to revolution or war. Oppressed and impatient as the Jews were under the various masters that subjugated them, and holding, as we conceive, many erroneous views concerning the manner in which the Messiah's kingdom should be established, yet they never presumed to anticipate his coming, until the individual had actually appeared, to whom all their prophecies, in our belief, had distinctly pointed from the beginning of the world.

Yet, further on this subject, the glorious and triumphant kingdom to be established by the Messiah, in no instance required the aiding hands of the Jewish nation. In no one instance, does a prophet call on them to be in readiness to render military service to Messiah the prince. In no one instance, are the swords, the valor, or the patriotism of the nation apostrophised, or even alluded to by a single prophet: whatever was the glory or the power of his sovereignty, it was to be accomplished by him alone, invested with power from Jehovah on high.

To what selfish purpose then, could the theory of the prefigured

Messiah be directed, when the Jews, instead of being instructed to co-operate with him by personal service, were alone taught that their salvation should come, and the re-establishment of their kingdom be accomplished, through the overwhelming influence of supernatural agencies alone. For the prophets invariably speak of their exile from Judea, their dispersion among the nations of the earth, and enduring all calamity and oppression at the time that their deliverance should be effected.

But, surely, we have said enough on this subject, let any reasonable sceptic ponder on this remarkable feature in the Jewish religion exhibiting the doctrine of the Messiah, and all its extraordinary contingencies,—let him consider that this doctrine depends not upon any one prophetic annunciation, but upon the combined exhibitions of all the prophetic writers, each of whom communicate particulars to the general description, not mentioned by the others. Let him then consider that these prophetic intimations commenced with the first parents of mankind, and were continually extended by the revelation of new particulars, from time to time, until about four hundred years prior to the manifestation of the individual thus prefigured. Then the prophetic vision ceased, leaving the recorded annunciations in the hands of the Jewish nation, by which they were to verify the fulfilment of the revelations of the prophets, after the very last of these inspired messengers had been for centuries numbered with the dead.

Let the sceptic then attempt to show that this machinery either originated, or was agitated by knavish priests or kings for selfish purposes. Let him also explain why the conversion of the Gentiles, to the worship of Jehovah, should be considered so glorious a consummation to a scheme of priestly imposture, and, finally, let him explain why knaves and impostors should foretell, that the Jews should reject the Messiah when he should come, that they should endure grievous calamities, and that they should at last be received into that favor and mercy of their God, which the Gentiles had enjoyed during the most unhappy dispersion of the Jews themselves.

It is now, however, time that we should close our views upon this subject, for, I trust, we have sufficiently vindicated, from all unreasonable surmises, the mere theory concerning the Messiah's kingdom, so largely announced by the inspired prophets. We shall, therefore, terminate this chapter with a few remarks, that may enable the reader to enter upon the discussion contained in the ensuing chapter.

From the repeated and abundant revelations, made by the inspired

prophets, concerning the advent and glorious triumphs of the Messiah, no belief was more firmly established in the minds of the Jewish people, during the continuance of their civil government, than that there was a day coming in the goodness and providence of God, when every thing blessed and happy should be communicated to them by their Messiah, and in which all the Gentile nations should become participants. Whatever ideas of national supremacy and aggrandizement, individuals among the Jewish people may have inferred from the metaphorical expressions of the prophets, yet certainly, no religious Jew instructed in the Scriptures, either in past or present time could believe, that the influence of the Messiah's kingdom upon the Gentile world would be anything else than one of the most unbounded benevolence and religious enjoyment. I do not think it at all necessary to establish this fact, for I know of none to dispute it, but as a matter of singular importance to our investigation, I have endeavored to show what a large amount of happiness and prosperity was always contemplated to be in preparation for the Gentile world in the most ancient Jewish writings. And this fact must be ample proof to any considerate and honest reader, that there could be no selfishness of scheme implicated in a system, that overlooked all national prejudices, and anticipated with glowing enthusiasm the conversion of the heathen nations, and the establishment of a kingdom on earth, in which war and its desolations should be unknown for ever.

“And he (Messiah) shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;

“But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken it.” Micah iv. 3 and 4.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE PROMULGATION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

At last, that series of mystic works was accomplished, that Daniel, the prophet, foretold should elapse between the rebuilding of the temple and the advent of "Messiah, the prince." The consummation of the time thus predicted, became still more interesting in the circumstance, that Judea had now fallen under the domination of Rome, and thus the inspired declaration of the patriarch Jacob, became consonant with that of the prophet Daniel in determining this eventful period of time; "*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh (the Messiah) come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*"

Whilst the Jewish people awaited in anxious expectation the important events to be disclosed in the consummation of this prophetic period,* and anticipated the commencement of that glorious order of things, so long and so frequently announced to them by the inspired messengers of Jehovah, there suddenly appeared among them, an individual, who, under the appellation of John the Baptist, came forth from the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, as a herald, the approach of the kingdom of God, and that the Messiah would soon be made manifest to the world.

With great zeal, John the Baptist discharged the functions of his peculiar mission, and whilst in the actual performance of his preparatory ministration, he received from the Spirit of God, that

*That the Jews did expect the advent of the Messiah about this time, is so notorious, that the very heathen themselves were aware of their expectation, and applied it to explain the origin of the war that terminated in their destruction.

Suetonius says, "there was an ancient and general opinion famous throughout the Eastern nations, that the fates had determined that there should come out of Judea, those that should govern the world," and he adds, "that the Jews applying this to themselves, rebelled against the Roman power.

Tacitus, remarks, "a great many were possessed with a persuasion, that it was contained in the ancient books of the priests, that at that time the East should prevail, and that they who should govern the world, were to come out of Judea."

It seems scarcely necessary to add the testimony of Josephus, who states, "the Jews rebelled against the Romans, being encouraged by a famous prophecy in their Scriptures, that about that time, a great prince should be born among them, that should rule the world."

supernatural intimation, by which he was enabled to point out the Messiah to that more devout portion of the Jewish people, who, influenced by his preaching, endeavored to prepare themselves suitably to receive the "Desire of all nations."

But nothing could be more contrary to the lofty expectation of the Jews, than the condition of the meek and humble Jesus of Nazareth, thus announced to them as the Messiah of whom so much had been spoken by the prophets, and whom they had so long anticipated as their deliverer from Roman domination and tyranny. Hence from the very commencement of his official ministration, he was mistrusted by the nation in general, and became, in an especial manner, an offence to the dignitaries, the rabbis, and the priesthood. The whole transactions of his life, as well as his doctrine, were entirely in opposition to what national prejudices had induced them to anticipate. For under the teaching of their presumptuous rabbis, they had forced the predictions of the prophets concerning the Messiah, into a scheme, that regarded alone the political prosperity of the Jewish nation, and had overlooked altogether, that Jehovah himself, had purposes of his own to accomplish in the coming of this important personage.

Though we are fully prepared to account for the incredulity of the Jews, and their rejection of the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to be considered the Messiah. Yet as this subject cannot be so well appreciated at the present time, as it can be after we have exhibited those arguments that establish his claim, we shall postpone any consideration of their remarkable incredulity, until we have closed our exhibition of proofs.

As the Messiah has been alone revealed to us through the medium of the Old Testament writings, it is evident that in attempting to ascertain the right of Jesus of Nazareth to that appellation, we must look, *in the first place*, to those ancient prophecies that announced the characteristic proceedings of this eminent personage, and the time at which he should come into the world. We must, *in the second place*, ascertain that the character and era of Jesus of Nazareth, accorded with the ancient prophecies, for it is thus alone, that we can be justified in considering him to have been the Messiah.

But we are precluded by the limits of our Essay, from making any comparison of such numerous particulars as are here implied. We must suppose the reader to be acquainted with the simple facts of the subject. Our province must be to vindicate the Evangelists and Apostles, and to shew them to be credible authorities for the absolute truth of the particulars they have certified to our faith.

Before we enter upon this scrutiny, it is proper that we give a summary view of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, as related by the evangelists. This will enable us to keep more distinctly before our eyes, the individual, upon whose account we are so deeply interested, to ascertain the credibility of his disciples and witnesses.

Jesus of Nazareth, is represented by the evangelists, to have been born after a miraculous conception, of a virgin espoused to a man in the humblest walks of life, but who was, nevertheless, directly of the royal line of David. Jesus was educated by his parents in a manner suitable to their reduced condition in society, which, in no instance, that we can discern, ever looked forward to any future eminence in life. But it is evident that Jesus himself, was conscious of his important destiny even from an early childhood.

When he was about thirty years of age, he began to announce that the reign of the kingdom of heaven was at hand,* and privately he informed his disciples that he was the Messiah. Accompanied by a greater or less number of followers, he travelled through various parts of Judea, instructing the people, and substantiating his claim of being divinely commissioned, by miraculously healing all those sick or infirm persons who asked succor from him. In these most benevolent exercises, it is reasonable to believe he was engaged about three years and a half, when, having greatly offended the priesthood and others of ecclesiastical authority among the Jewish people, both by the doctrines he taught and the reproofs he made against their corrupt teaching and practices, he was ultimately arrested by the command of the chief priests, and condemned to die as a blasphemer against God. But, as the Jewish authorities had no power, at that time, to inflict capital punishments, he was delivered, by them, to the Roman governor, under an accusation of meditating hostility against the imperial power, which then held Judea in subjection.

Though Pilate, the Roman governor, saw the frivolousness of this charge, and would have dismissed Jesus, he was overpowered by the clamor of the Jewish people, excited by the priesthood and the leaders of the predominant religious sects, so that, fearful lest he might compromit himself with the emperor Tiberius, he unwillingly condemned Jesus to be crucified, which sentence was carried into execution, and he, having died, was buried by certain of his

*The kingdom of God; and the kingdom of heaven; were common phrases amongst the Jews to signify the times of the Messiah:—Locke, Reasonableness of Christianity, 33.

disciples. The evangelists then affirm that, after the space of about three days, he rose from this state of death, and manifested himself to sundry persons, on different occasions, for about forty days. Finally he ascended, as it were, in a visible manner, to heaven, in the presence of his disciples, leaving this command to them, that they should go forth to the world preaching the gospel,* and teaching all men the doctrines they had learned from him, testifying to the particulars of his life, his death, and his resurrection, and declaring, at the same time, that all who should put their trust and confidence in his power to save them, should inherit everlasting life.

This brief exhibition, I trust, will be sufficient to prevent the reader little acquainted with the relation of the evangelists, from falling into the gross error of supposing that Jesus of Nazareth was merely a moral teacher, who attempted a reformation of the corrupt doctrines and practices of the Jews, and who was prematurely cut off before he could complete that object. Such a notion as this is most incorrect and untrue. The office of Jesus Christ, according to the evangelists, was to accomplish those unknown and inscrutable purposes contemplated in the divine economy, that first announced the doctrine of the Messiah to mankind, and which, in its nature and condition, are wholly unintelligible to us. All that we seem able to comprehend of this subject is, that exercises, both of doing and suffering, were required of the Messiah, as essential to his inscrutable functions, and by which he was empowered, after his resurrection from the dead, to promise eternal life to as many as should put their trust in him. But as we shall speak hereafter of this subject as a religious dogma, we shall postpone its consideration at the present time.

I must do the deists the justice to say, that they almost universally express admiration and esteem for the person and character of Jesus of Nazareth. They have freely acknowledged that his doctrines are of the utmost benevolence and philanthropy, and conformable to the highest standard of moral excellence. There is scarcely one that has ventured to impeach his integrity, or suspect the purity of his motives; on the contrary, they have even admitted an honest purpose with him in his assuming the name of the Messiah, on the ground that he made use of the prejudices of his countrymen in favor of that creation of national pride and bigotry, as the doctrine of the Messiah is sometimes called, in order to establish his moral doctrines with greater power on the minds of his fellow-citizens.

* Preaching the gospel, i. e. proclaiming good news. "What the inspired writers call *the gospel*, is nothing but the good tidings that the Messiah and his kingdom was come."—Locke, Reasonableness, &c. 53.

But, at the same time that the deists make such admissions, they also very carefully tell us, that Jesus of Nazareth wrote nothing himself, and that all our knowledge concerning him has been derived through the medium of his disciples, who, after his death, wrote what they saw fit, and represented his actions and his doctrines in a manner conformable to their own views, and which involve every suspicion of a selfish scheme to their own advantage, set off by a raving fantastic enthusiasm.

Our evident course, then, as suggested by deistical objections, is not to undertake any vindication of the personal history or character of Jesus of Nazareth, for in the main they admit his moral character to be unimpeachable. We are called on to establish the credibility and integrity of his evangelists and apostles, to substantiate the truth, not of a part, but the whole of their relation, and the justifiable inferences to be deduced from their statements.

In what manner shall we be enabled to establish these most important particulars?

The ground upon which we examined the constitution of the Jewish church was this: If the institutions of Moses were of fraudulent and knavish construction, they could have been only contrived to answer some selfish purposes, whether excited by ambition or sensuality.

On subjecting them, therefore, to the most searching scrutiny that such a suspicion could suggest, we found that every law or appointment was founded upon principles utterly opposed to such an imputation. We, therefore, came distinctly to the conclusion, that where every appointment was in direct opposition to the interests of a worldly or selfish policy, whether civil or ecclesiastic, it was absolutely incredible, that the system could be the contrivance of knaves and impostors. Where there is nothing to be gained, and the whole spirit of the system is in opposition to selfish motives, it is utterly absurd to ascribe knavery or imposture to the founders.

In proceeding to examine the Christian dispensation upon similar views, we must ascertain what possible advantage, in any respect, could be derived by the apostles and evangelists in fabricating the relations they have given us concerning Jesus Christ, and in what manner the system they promulgated, could work to their benefit, or that of their disciples. If there was nothing to be gained, it is most unjustifiable to charge these witnesses of Jesus Christ, with selfish or dishonest contrivances; and hence, as with the Jewish Church, there can be no knavery or imposture, where there is not some advantage to be gained.

There is this remarkable peculiarity involved in the history and character of the promulgators of the Christian religion, that essentially distinguishes them from those who constituted the Jewish church, *viz.* they authorized no temporal, or visible establishment, whose fundamental principles as a scheme of human policy, we can investigate.

The apostles neither set up, nor proposed any scheme of church or hierarchy, that could, in the spirit of their institutions, exercise any ecclesiastical government over their disciples and converts. This must be evident to any one who thinks independently on the subject, for not only is there wanting any plan or draft of a constitution for a visible temporal church, but the very allusions of the evangelists or apostles to the mere subject of order in the religious assemblies of their converts, are so slight and incidental, that the most opposite guesses, rather than inferences, have been made by men upon the actual condition of the primitive Christian church.

This omission, on the part of the New Testament writers, affords us an argument of the greatest value, for the apostles being alone familiar on the subject of church governments, with the orders and appointments of the Jewish hierarchy, one would suppose that, had they been governed by any selfish consideration, they might, without any difficulty, have introduced an analogous establishment. That they should altogether omit to make any establishment, speaks volumes in favor of their honesty and disinterestedness.

And to give this argument, the full weight to which it is entitled, the evangelists and apostles invariably represent Jesus Christ to possess a sovereign dominion, and that, ultimately, the whole world should be subdued before him. This doctrine they unceasingly preached. But, at the same time, they declared this dominion was to be understood alone spiritually, and to such an absolute degree, that they neither established a church government or system, nor ever taught the people to look to a church, not even for the solution of cases of doubt or conscience, much less to one that should exert any temporal jurisdiction.

Not only have they abstained from enacting any thing that can be impeached on the score of ambitious motives, but they formally and expressly announce, that Jesus Christ himself declared that the kingdom he should establish in this world, was one that should not be seen or perceived in any external form. It was invisible, and the subjects of this government were to be influenced by their consciences alone, in the discharge of every particular duty. So far

from offering temporal honors or official dignities to his followers, Jesus Christ foretells them, according to the evangelists, alone of tribulation and afflictions, sorrow and persecution. He exhorts them to endure all these things with patience, and to continue in well doing as long as life should last, for not until they should rise from the dead, does he promise them the reward of their patience.

The sole office exercised by the apostles and evangelists, was to proclaim to all men that Jesus was the promised Messiah, that forgiveness of sin was to be sought alone through him in virtue of his atonement and intercession, and not by the observance of moral duties as among the heathen, or through the observances, whether moral or ceremonial, of the law of Moses*. These last, they declared to be alone typical of that atonement, fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth in his death and official intercession.

The means by which the first preachers of Christianity established the truth of their doctrine on the minds of their hearers, were two-fold:

First, by showing how the prophecies of ancient Scripture had been fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth; and *secondly*, by the performance of miracles accomplished through an invocation of his name.

On these subjects we shall make a few observations that the reader may more distinctly appreciate them.

Concerning the prophecies of the Scripture we must remark, that the Messiah is no where fully depicted by any one prophetic writer, but each one supplies particulars of his character and functions, which in certain instances, are seemingly irreconcilable with the general description. Therefore, when the apostles and evangelists showed how all circumstances had been fulfilled, and how all anomalies were completely reconciled in the history of the life, the actions, the doctrines, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, it seems almost impossible that any rational man could withhold his assent but that this person must have been the Messiah.†

*"Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures,

And said unto them, thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, the third day:

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

And ye are witnesses of these things."—Luke xxiv. 45, &c.

†Though an exhibition of the instances in which the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, is of essential importance in establishing his claim of being the Messiah,—yet such a discourse would so largely add to the bulk of this work, that we are compelled to withhold the statement, and to refer the reader to those writers who have made special details on these

But, if any doubt might remain upon the understanding of those who had studied the ancient prophecies, it would seem that doubt must give way, when the disciples of Jesus Christ wrought miracles by invoking the name of their master. That supernatural actions were performed by them, I presume cannot be denied now, for neither Jew nor heathen, who lived about those times, seem to have disputed the fact. They very erroneously attributed these miraculous displays of power to demoniacal or magical influences; and thus at the same time that they testify to us that miracles were performed by the disciples of Jesus Christ, they also furnish us with an explanation why they themselves unhappily refused to believe a system attested by evidences of the approbation of God.

The morality taught by the apostles can scarcely be said to differ from that of the law of Moses, though they exposed and set aside many pharasaical corruptions, prevailing among the Jews at the time of the advent. The New Testament writers, however, more expressly carry out into greater extensiveness of application, all moral obligations, even to the most secret thoughts and affections of the human heart, and that, without regarding any national or sectarian difference between men. Universal love or charity was required for all mankind, under the unerring rule of doing to every one, what they could ask to be done to themselves.

In the discharge of all such duties, men were considered free agents, undergoing moral trial or discipline, in like manner, as in every former age of the world. But at the same time they were most abundantly informed, that if a man did transgress in any particular, that there was a mediator and redeemer existing in Jesus Christ, who would procure pardon and forgiveness of sin to all who should sincerely repent, and seek their salvation through him.

Thus the system established by the disciples of Jesus Christ was absolutely one that had no temporal foundation whatever to rest upon. It made no difference whether the Christian was a Jew, Greek, or Roman; whether he was rich or poor; a slave or a free man. And consistently with these disinterested views, the apostles required their followers to submit to every civil ordinance and institution of the different nations and kingdoms to which they were subject; "give honor to whom honor, tribute to whom tribute is due," &c., formally stating, that the then established government and civil authority stood under the permission or the appointment of God.

particulars. There is a very good view of them given by Horne in his Introduction to the Scriptures. Vol. 1. App. iv.

Thus not only is every single motive disclaimed by the apostles, that would tend to establish temporal rule or dominion over mankind, but they taught their followers to look for persecution and tribulation in this life, and the reward promised for well doing was alone to be received after death. Nor is it an insignificant matter to remark, that the particulars of the blessedness of heaven is no where even insinuated by them, it is alone stated to be a most exalted state of happiness, but without the enunciation of a single particular, by which the sensual nature of man might be stimulated into desire of its enjoyment. This circumstance in itself, is one of some importance towards estimating the integrity of the first promulgators of the Christian religion, for it must be evident to every one, that as the immortality of the soul, and future judgment, were their essential doctrines, so impostors could afford to promise nothing more abundantly than the fruition of heaven. This every false religion has availed itself of to make such special descriptions, that they are perfectly intelligible to the meanest capacity.

To our preceding arguments thus vindicating the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ, from any suspicion of having been influenced by any ambitious, avaricious, or other selfish motives, let us now further urge, that as the moral doctrines taught by them are of the most excellent purity, of universal benevolence and charity, so they are most rigid in forbidding excess, sensuality, pride, and every other evil passion whatever. This being the fact, and no one in his senses can deny it,* let me then ask upon what earthly ground can

*Lord Bolingbroke, however inimical to the theory of the divine constitution of Christianity he may have been, has not hesitated to render the clearest testimony to the excellent morality of the Christian religion, as the following extracts from his writings abundantly show. And his observation on the subject of theological teaching, not only is creditable to his discernment, but does justice to the actual merits of Christianity, which most other deists have endeavored to confound with false teachings of men.

"The Gospel teaches universal benevolence, recommends the precepts of it, and commands the observation of them in particular instances occasionally, always supposes them, always enforces them, and makes the law of right reason a law in every possible definition of the word, beyond all cavil. *I say beyond all cavil*, because a great deal of *silly cavil* has been employed to perplex the plainest thing in nature, and the best determined signification of words according to the different occasions on which they are used." Bolingbroke, Essay 4th, section 5th.

"The Gospel of Christ is one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity." Bolingbroke, Fragments of Essays, 20.

"No religion ever appeared in the world whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind. If it has had a contrary effect, it has had it apparently, not really. Theology (*that is* the doctrinal teaching of men) is a science that may be compared justly to the box of Pandora." Bolingbroke, Essay 4th, section 4th.

any one suppose the apostles of Jesus Christ to have been knaves and impostors, who without setting up the least ecclesiastical power, lived in poverty under persecution, and finally gave the last testimony of their sincerity, by dying as martyrs to the truth of the doctrines they taught.

To this array of proof, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah as certified by the writings of the evangelists and apostles, whether as implicated in the fulfilment of ancient prophecies, and in the performance of miracles as evidences of his divine commission, I know of no objection whatever, as made by deists or sceptics, that deserves an examination in this place; but the single circumstance that the Jews, as a nation, did, at the advent, disbelieve Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, notwithstanding the proofs he exhibited to them, and that they have ever since rejected his claim.

Though there is something plausible in this objection, at first sight, yet, in truth it is not an objection, but one of the most important evidences that can be advanced to substantiate the divine commission of our Redeemer. For the inspired prophets of the Old Testament distinctly announced that the Jews would reject the Messiah when he should come,* that he would then turn to the Gentiles, and that they would acknowledge him. Consequently *the unbelief of the Jews, and their rejection of Jesus of Nazareth, constitutes a proof actually essential to the verification of his mission. Without this unbelief and rejection of him by the Jews, it would be impossible that Jesus of Nazareth could be the Messiah.*

The exhibition of proof, therefore, is complete, and the objection of the deists has only led us to a more distinct perception of the irrefragable evidence by which the Christian religion is sustained.

The incredulity of the Jews concerning Jesus Christ is, however, a most extraordinary circumstance, and deserves our closest attention. As the subject seems not to be understood by the Christian world, I have made an exhibition of this matter, and have analysed it in its more important features. The reader will find it in our second appendix, and I recommend its perusal, not only as containing, in my apprehension, a true solution to a most interesting subject of difficult consideration, but as presenting, at the same time, a warning lesson to the Christian world, upon a subject which they, in general, do not seem to appreciate.

We have now completed an examination of those more important particulars that have any direct bearing upon the credibility of those

*The reader can verify this fact by referring to the digest of prophecies that we have made, commencing at page 203, preceding.

witnesses who testify to the divine constitution of the Christian religion. It, therefore, only remains that we should recapitulate the points we have established, before we go into any exposition of the peculiar doctrines of the system.

We have shown that the theory of our religion is exclusively based on the fact, that the Creator of all things has announced to man, that if he will be obedient to the requirements of a system appointed by him, that then the Creator will bless man with a happy immortality; but that, if man will not seek the favor and blessing of his Creator, that he shall become miserable and unhappy in a future life.

Our attempt, therefore, has been confined to show that the evidences for the truth of this revealed system are abundantly sufficient to establish the fact of its being a divine constitution.

We have shown distinctly that those individuals who had the dispensation of this system committed to them during the long continuance of the Jewish economy, stand unimpeachable in the credibility of their testimony; for we have scrutinized their motives and proceedings by the severest tests to which human evidence can be subjected, and their integrity remains not only spotless, but irradiated with the splendor of the fact, that they alone among men, have maintained a system not only free from all imputation of ecclesiastical fraud, but as exhibiting the most unbounded scheme of benevolence and philanthropy of which we can conceive.*

Out of the numerous witnesses that stand on the Jewish foundation, originates a further amount of testimony in those prophetic intimations made by men not only of unimpeachable integrity as to their personal disinterestedness, but in the fact that they foretold, centuries before the day of fulfilment, the advent of that important personage to whom the destinies of mankind were committed, and of whom it was predicted that he should establish a glorious dominion throughout the nations of the earth. As the advent of the Messiah, and the kingdom he should establish, was implicated in the concurrence of circumstances of the most anomalous kind, and which, indeed, in certain particulars, seemed contradictory to the general theory of the subject; so the divine constitution of the system was necessarily exhibited by their literal and actual fulfilment, in the advent of Jesus Christ. For, as nothing but the Spirit of God could announce,

* Nothing is more correct than the observation of Bishop Berkely: "It is impossible to produce any useful truth, any moral precept, any salutary principle, from the whole scope and range of philosophy, ancient and modern, which is not comprehended in the Christian religion, and by it enforced with stronger motives, and urged to the highest degrees of perfection."

for centuries beforehand, the condition of an age hidden in the womb of time, so the minute fulfilment of these ancient predictions, was abundant proof of the inspiration of those individuals who had predicted events to be so remotely fulfilled, and under such extraordinary conditions.

Jesus of Nazareth did fulfil these events of the prophesied counsel of Jehovah, accomplishing them particularly and minutely, so that by his birth, his life, his actions, his death, his resurrection, and exaltation, the entire roll of prophecy, mysterious and anomalous as it might seem to have been, was clearly explained. Further than this, many prophetic annunciations that had not been supposed to refer to him were accomplished in his mission, redoubling the amount of divine evidence on this subject, by a fulfilment of things that previously had not been anticipated.

The evidences of the divine commission of Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, are twofold; they partly depend upon the credibility of those individuals who were eye-witnesses to the personal acts of his ministry, and they partly depend upon the perceptions of our own understanding, as being able to determine the fulfilment of ancient prophecies accomplished at the time and since the exaltation of the Redeemer. Such are the continual increase of his sovereignty among the nations of the earth, his prophecy that Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles, until their times shall be fulfilled; the rise of that great apostacy in the Christian world which his apostles predicted, and other prophetic particulars that we cannot speak of at present.

We also investigated the question as to the integrity of the apostles of Jesus Christ, and examined them according to every rule or principle by which the veracity of men can be tested, and we find them to be wholly unimpeachable in the discharge of those philanthropic duties, to whose importance and truth they gave the last evidence that can be required of human sincerity, to wit, their lives at the martyr's stake.

And finally, we have, as it were, the testimony of God himself, who has enabled Christianity from the humblest beginning, to triumph over every opposition, and to establish itself throughout every civilized region of the globe, and over the understanding and conscience of the most intellectual of men. We must say with Mosheim on this subject, "Unless we suppose here a divine interposition, how was it possible that men, destitute of all human aid, without credit or riches, learning or eloquence, could, in so short a time, persuade a considerable part of mankind to abandon the relig-

ion of their ancestors? How was it possible that a handful of apostles, who as fishermen and publicans, must have been contemned by their own nation, and as Jews must have been odious to all others, could engage the learned and mighty, as well as the simple and those of low degree, to forsake their favorite prejudices, and to embrace a new religion, which was an enemy to their corrupt passions."

Is it possible then to furnish testimony more satisfactory as to the credibility of those persons who have certified to us the revelations of Jehovah? And is it anywise arrogant to state, that the man who refuses to believe the divine constitution of the Christian religion, would continue in that unbelief, even though one should arise from the dead to make such a communication. But however this may be, I shall cease to make any further exhibition of proof on the subject. Let men continue in their unbelief if they please, but that they have evidence enough to form a true judgment, I hold to be indisputable as measured by all those principles, by which men do judge of truth, as implicated in all those issues in which the dearest interests of humanity are daily investigated and determined. And what higher standard of proof has any one a right to demand?*

*The reader who will pause, and consider the course we have pursued in our previous investigation, will not fail to perceive how accordant every principle we have investigated, has been shown to be with the whole subject. To give greater weight to this very important argument, I subjoin the following extract from Starkie on Evidence, which fully recognizes the value of such proofs, and classes them among the highest exhibitions of moral evidence.

"Where direct evidence of the fact in dispute is wanting, the more the jury can see of the surrounding facts and circumstances, the more correct their judgment is likely to be. It is possible, that some circumstances may be misrepresented, or acted with a view to deceive, but the whole context of circumstances cannot be fabricated; the false invention must have its boundaries, where it may be compared with the truth, and therefore, the more extensive the view of the jury is of all the minute circumstances of the transaction, the more likely will they be to arrive at a true conclusion. Truth is necessarily consistent with itself, in other words, all facts which really did happen, did actually consist and agree with each other. If then the circumstances of the case as detailed in evidence, are incongruous and inconsistent, that inconsistency must have arisen either from mistake, from wilful misrepresentation, or from the correct representation of facts, prepared and acted with a view to deceive. From whatever source the inconsistency may arise, it is easy to see that the greater the number of circumstances is, which are exhibited to the jury, the more likely will it be that the truth will prevail, since the stronger and more numerous will be the circumstances on the side of truth. It will be supported by facts, the effect of which no human sagacity could have foreseen, and which are, therefore, beyond the reach of suspicion; whilst, on the other hand, fraudulent evidence must necessarily either be confined to a few facts, or be open to detection by affording many opportunities of comparing it with that which is known to be true. Fabricated facts, must in their very nature, be such as are likely to become material, (i. e. those that regard essential particulars.) Hence it has frequently been said,

I entreat the sceptical reader to ponder on this last observation, and not suffer himself to be misled by any notion of requiring an absolute demonstration of the truth of Christianity. We have shown that Christianity is addressed to men as intellectual beings and free agents, who are undergoing probation under its appointments. We are, therefore, to judge of its truth or falsehood by the same rule, that we judge of any other intellectual or moral subject. The evidences in its favor, are to be weighed against those that oppose its claims, and the understanding and the conscience are to decide upon the subject. Alas for him, that sets aside the greater for the less amount of evidence; he certainly must be without excuse in that day when God shall judge all the secrets of the human heart.

that a well supported and consistent body of circumstantial evidence, is sometimes stronger than even direct evidence of a fact; that is, the degree of uncertainty which arises from a doubt as to the credibility of direct witnesses, may exceed that which arises upon the question whether a proper inference has been made from facts well ascertained. A witness may have been suborned to give a false account of a transaction to which he alone was privy, and the whole rests upon the degree of credit to be attached to the veracity of the individual, but where a great number of independent facts conspire to the same conclusion, and are supported by many unconnected witnesses, the degree of credibility to be attached to the evidence increases in a very high proportion, arising from the improbability that all those witnesses should be mistaken, or perjured, and that all the circumstances should have happened contrary to the usual and ordinary course of human affairs.—Starkie i. 39, 40.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE, INTEGRITY OF THE TEXT, AND INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLICAL WRITINGS.

IN the examination to which we have hitherto subjected the Scripture writers, we have alone regarded their integrity and disinterestedness, as constituting them credible witnesses. Having sufficiently examined this subject, with all the suspiciousness with which a rational man might be supposed to regard this matter, we have nevertheless been unable to discern the least trace of fraud, selfishness, or ecclesiastical contrivance, in those persons who have written the volume of the Scriptures. We may, therefore, fully conclude, that the biblical writers are absolutely free from any influence of selfishness, fraud, and imposture, and that their testimony is wholly unimpeachable on the score of moral honesty and integrity.

This fact, therefore, proves distinctly, that the volume of the Scripture has been handed down to our times wholly free from any wilful corruption or selfish interpolation, for our scrutiny having been conducted upon the copies now in use, as collated with those of the greatest antiquity, vindicates this point completely, for I know not a single passage of our printed Bibles, that can justify the smallest imputation of having been written from a selfish or dishonest motive.

But, nevertheless, to use the phrase of an apostle, our treasure in the biblical writings has been contained in earthen vessels, and though no charge of fraudulent corruption can be made against the writers of the sacred volume, yet the accuracy of its truth, and the distinctness of its narration, has been obscured to a greater or less degree, by the many accidents to which it has been subjected during the three thousand years that have elapsed since men began to record these revelations of God. The Scriptures themselves are not the revelation of Jehovah, but a collection of the writings of men who have in them recorded what Jehovah had announced to mankind, connected with the history of events whether natural or miraculous, that occurred during the times of the divine visitations.

Hence it is evident that the Scripture text is yet to be examined on two particulars of critical accuracy, viz.

First. Whether the doctrines taught in the Scriptures are so undoubtedly distinct in their enunciation, that there can be no difficulty in ascertaining the duty we are to perform. If there be any embarrassment on this particular subject, the Scriptures are of no value whatever, although the writers be clearly vindicated from the charge of any intentional fraud or corruption.

Secondly. With respect to the historical statements of the Scripture, whether of natural or of miraculous events, however desirable it might be to have them correctly related, the canons of good sense will admit of a certain degree of obscurity or inaccuracy of relation: provided the substantial truth be sufficiently distinct, we need not be disturbed by any mere defect in the correct statement of particular circumstances, for such statements are not matters of faith, but of record, and however valuable they may be to a good historical relation, they have no matter of salvation in them. But upon this subject there is no necessity to enlarge, as any person of ordinary capacity can fully appreciate the subject.*

Having by our previous discourse established the general credibility of the several writers of the Scripture, as received by the Protestant churches, we now proceed to investigate several critical subjects, pertaining to the biblical writings themselves, preparatory to stating the particular doctrines they announce to mankind. These subjects are as follow:

1st. By what authority has the canon of Scripture been made?

2d. Have the Scriptures been handed down to our time the same, *verbatim et literatim*, as they were originally written?

3rd. Are the Scriptures to be regarded as being inspired, *verbatim et literatim*, or only so substantially?

4th. What is the absolute value of the English, or any other translation, in communicating a true knowledge of the divine revelation?

Taking up these subjects in the above order, we shall commence with an investigation of the authority by which our present canon has been made.

*Thus, for instance, there is an apparent discrepancy between St. Matthew and St. Luke, concerning the particular death of Judas Iscariot. But what does the difference signify? The substantial statement is, that Judas came to a violent end. The whole discrepancy depends, in all probability, upon some misunderstanding of the original word employed by St. Matthew. I presume the reader does not require to be told that Matthew wrote his Gospel in the Syriac language, and that the Greek version, which we possess, is but a translation.

It is important to ascertain the true canon of Scripture from the fact sufficiently notorious, that certain religious books, whether pertaining to the Jewish or Christian dispensation, have been judged not to be inspired productions, and are commonly termed apochryphal. It therefore seems necessary that there should be some rule by which we are to determine those that are true or inspired.

We may, without the least hesitation, affirm that there never has been any canon of Scripture determined by the authority of any body of men, whether of the Jewish, or of the Christian church. The notion that the Jewish sanhedrim determined the inspiration of the books of the Old Testament, by a careful investigation of the fact at the time of their original promulgation, is a notion without any historical warrant, and even if true would not be worth a straw. For what divine assistance or authority had they to make such a judgment. From the want of any evidence on the subject, we are alone justified to consider, that, excepting the book of the law of Moses, which from the foundation of the Jewish state, was their sole code, both civil and religious, the other books of the Old Testament were simply received from the time of their publication, by pious individuals, whether lay or clerical, who preserved them with reverence, multiplied copies, and who quoted or read them among the people at large.

It is very possible, after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, that the more ancient books of the present Old Testament canon, received an official recognition by Ezra and other chiefs of the Jewish nation at that time, and in all likelihood there was a recension of the Scripture text made under their supervision. But be this as it may, there is not the least authority to consider the work to have been accomplished by inspired men. I can see no where in the Scripture that Ezra himself makes the least claim to inspiration, and to ascribe this sacred influence to the members of the great sanhedrim, and rabbi Simon the Just, is one of the absurdest notions that the Christian church has ever entertained.

The Apochryphal books of the Old Testament were never regarded by the Jews, but as uninspired productions, nor can we perceive any reason whatever to consider them otherwise. But if any one will give us sufficient argument, by which we may be able to discern their inspiration, no one can object to receive them as such.

With respect to the canonical books of the New Testament, we can speak with more positiveness, as will appear by the following historical view.

Not only the immediate disciples and apostles of our Saviour, wrote historic relations and religious epistles, in the first century after Christ, but many other persons did the same, some in virtue of their appointments as teachers and instructors, others from a desire to preserve the truth of events and doctrines considered interesting and important. And as men of the present day, so anciently, there were not only judicious and capable writers, but there were also a number who were injudicious, visionary, and credulous, who, relating many things from hearsay, or without a sufficient knowledge of facts, multiplied impertinent and silly stories, and often false doctrines through their imbecility. Others, again, in a later period, perverted the writings of individuals of a former age, in order to sustain themselves in some of the numerous heresies that arose in the first and second centuries after Christ.

In consequence of the number and the unjustifiable uses made of such books, it appears that about the beginning of the fourth century (A. D. 300) it became an object of much solicitude among the more pious and learned Christians of that age, to determine among these various writings which were untrue, in contradistinction to those which were true; and which were credible, in contradistinction to those which were puerile or inaccurate. Hence we find several eminent men of that time, publishing catalogues of what they considered the genuine writings of the immediate disciples of our Saviour, and as might be expected, with certain differences of opinion as to the inspiration, or authority of particular books.

Out of this conflict of opinions arose a greater amount of scrutiny into the facts of the case, and which, except in a few instances, were not difficult in bringing to a satisfactory decision, for certain of these books had been always in official use among the whole Christian world. In the instances, where particular epistles had been addressed to particular churches, they might have either seen the very autographs themselves, or the copies which it was a part of the religious service of such churches to read to the congregation. On the whole, therefore, there could be no material difficulty in ascertaining what books the Christian churches had never ceased to hold in reverence, from the time of their promulgation; and which had been continually used for instruction and doctrine, in all their various congregations established throughout Christendom.

That there was no precipitancy in determining this subject, and that no *ecclesiastical decision* was ever made with authority on the canon, is evident from the great lapse of time that ensued before the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Revelation of St. John,

were fully received by the Christian churches. And I believe the Epistle of Jude, and certain Epistles of St. Peter, to this day, are not held to be canonical by many persons.

But the great number of details which an examination of the canonical books of Scripture would require, forbids us to attempt any investigation of this subject. We must refer the reader to Lardner, Michælis, and others, who have made such particulars the subjects of special study and investigation,

But whenever such an examination has been made by the reader, it will be seen that the books of the Old or New Testaments, from first to last, depend upon no other canon than those of historical testimony, continual use, circumstantial evidence and impartial judgment. They do not rest upon any authority whatever of an ecclesiastical tribunal, but upon the continuous and concurring testimony of individuals of successive ages of time, whether orthodox or not. None of those presumptuous councils, who undertook to decide on so many points of incomprehensible doctrine in the early ages of Christianity, ever attempted to make any determination on the subject of the canon.

Some persons, however, deceived by the word council, may object to this statement, that the council of Laodicea, and the 3d council of Carthage did determine the canon of Scripture. But this is both an error and a misrepresentation, for these two provincial councils, which had no more authority over the Christian world than the council of Baltimore, or Philadelphia, would have at present, do not undertake to determine whether a book of Scripture is canonical, or not; they simply recognized certain books, of which they give a list, to be of inspired authority. In like manner, the church of England, and the church of Scotland, in their constitutions, recognized the present volume of Scripture as being an inspired work, but they do not pretend to determine the fact from inspiration, nor does their recognition imply that the Christian world awaited their judgment on the subject. The whole act of the provincial councils of Laodicea, and of Carthage, like the proceeding of the English and Scotch churches, amounts to nothing more than a recognition; and so far their testimony is good as to the fact of the present volume of Scripture being then esteemed the genuine writings of those persons to whom they are attributed.

The council of Trent, A. D. 1546, is the first that ever made a book canonical that was not so considered previously. They recognized all the books that had been so esteemed from the earlier ages of Christianity, and at the same time, they included certain

Apochryphal books in their list, that had ever been rejected by the Jews. These books, therefore, the council of Trent have made canonical for the Catholics, but for them alone, as no other Christian sect regards their judgment in the smallest degree.*

The canon of Scripture, therefore, depends upon the amount of evidence which history, ancient controversies, and judicious criticism furnish on this subject; and if it may be permitted an individual to speak of himself, I can say that I never received the Scriptures as either inspired or canonical, until I determined the subject by a patient investigation to my own satisfaction, and without regarding any individual or body of ecclesiastics as of the least authority; and such, I presume, should be the case with every one who has the same privilege in his power. I have, finally, determined for myself, that the Scriptures, as received by the Protestant churches, with one exception, are fairly entitled to be considered either as the writings of inspired men, or as being honest, faithful records, made by men influenced alone by worthy and honorable motives. The only exception I make, is to the Song of Solomon, which I am wholly unable to discern by what reason it is to be considered a devotional book. I think we might also omit from the New Testament St. Paul's Epistle to Oenesimus, and the second, and third Epistles of St. John, as they seem to be mere familiar letters to individuals without any indication of inspiration. At the same time I know of nothing that impeaches their authorship.

There are a great many interesting particulars involved in the discussion concerning the canon, which so much exceed the limits of our Essay that we cannot even enumerate them. The only circumstance that we think expedient to notice, is the fact, that a number of books in the Old Testament, to wit, from Genesis to 2 Chronicles, inclusive, are not inscribed with the name of their authors. The book of Job, in like manner, and more or less of the Psalms and Proverbs. In the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews is without the author's name, and there has been some dispute whether the author of the book of Revelations, was the apostle John, or another person of similar name.

I call the reader's attention to these circumstances, since the deists have made the subject a matter of objection, that I may show

*My edition of the Douay Bible, says, that when the Council of Trent incorporated the books of Maccabees into their canon, they *preferred following their own tradition to that of the Scribes and Pharisees*. This judgment, therefore, implies no rule whereby we are to determine the canon, and until the comparative merits of the traditions be settled, I apprehend the safest course will be to hold with the rabbis.

that such omissions are of very little moment. It must be evident that the importance of the Scriptures consists in their being true relations, and though it might be more satisfactory to our curiosity, that we knew certainly who the writers were, yet had these books been inscribed with the authors' names that circumstance would neither have proved them true, nor would it have removed the smallest objection against them in the view of the deists.

As I have, I trust, sufficiently shown that the Scripture writings are absolutely free from any imputation of being a selfish scheme, devised for the benefit of an interested party, and as I have shown their whole scheme and purpose to be one of universal benevolence to the whole human race, and these facts being connected with the enunciation of prophecies which both have been fulfilled and are still fulfilling, so many centuries after they had been written, it must, in these circumstances, be evident that these books do contain, not only a true, but *an inspired relation*.

Our next subject of inquiry is, are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the same, *verbatim et literatim*, as when first published? Has nothing been lost or omitted from the text? Has nothing been interpolated?

The answer to this query is very plain. The Scripture writings are not the same, *verbatim et literatim*, as originally written. That certain matters have been added to the text is undeniable; and that other particulars have been either lost or omitted from the text, is also evident. Though these blemishes do exist, and, in some instances, leave us in confusion as to the exact truth of particular passages, yet they neither affect the substantial truth, or consistency of the Scripture relation, nor do they affect the religious doctrines there taught, in the slightest degree. We are not required to exhibit any proof as to the correctness of this last assertion, for that would be to prove the negative. It is sufficient for us to challenge our antagonist to any controversy on the subject.

Though it is not of material importance to our Essay to explain the causes that have occasioned a departure, in our present copies, from the original text, yet, as the exposition may be satisfactory to some of my readers, and as it may tend to correct certain misjudgments that many Christians have concerning the mere letter of the Scripture, I will make a brief statement on this subject, in which I shall exhibit, not only those circumstances that have tended to the injury of the Scripture text, but also of those that have had an influence in preserving it.

From the time of Moses, the promulgator of the Jewish law, un-

til about four hundred years before Christ, the volume of Old Testament Scripture was, from time to time, enlarged by the various books of which it is now composed. Consequently, the more ancient books have been exposed to a much greater amount of accidents, than the later writings, for they have only been preserved through natural means.

Of those various circumstances that have affected the integrity of the Scripture text, the most important can be traced to the involuntary errors of those persons, who have, in every successive age, copied the sacred writings. Every person who is the least instructed on this subject, or who has even made copies of any other writings, must know how difficult, if not how impossible, it is to avoid making many and often gross errors. We have not the space to enlarge upon this subject, but the fact itself may be sufficiently intelligible to the reader by the following enumeration, viz. the omission of a word, line, or paragraph, under various considerations of hastiness, fatigue in writing, or from having inadvertently overlooked the place from which they should continue to write. The substitution of one word for another, where the orthography was nearly the same, or the misapprehension of the words, when the copyist wrote from the reading of another person. The introduction of explanatory words, or of a gloss into the text, from not understanding whether it belonged to the margin or the text. In short, all those liabilities to error in copying that the experience of every one must be familiar with, who has ever exercised a thought on the subject.

In the next place we have to remark, that the Jews, the guardians of the Old Testament, were, at times, very irreligious, except in individual instances, and consequently were regardless of the preservation of their religious books. The nation also suffered much from civil commotions, and foreign invasions, and in the height of their irreligious conduct, the more important and influential people were carried away to Babylon, where they were held in captivity for seventy years. In these various moral and political catastrophes, the Scripture writings must have suffered more or less damage, for it seems to be evident that whole books of undoubted authority have perished,* and this being the case, it is impossible to suppose that the

* Lost books quoted in the Scriptures:

Book of Nathan, the prophet; book of Gad, the seer, 1 Chron. xxix. 29.

Prophecy of Ahijah; the visions of Iddo, 2 Chron. ix. 29.

Book of Shemaiah, the prophet, 2 Chron. xii. 15.

Book of Jehu, son of Hanani; 2 Chron. xx. 34.

A history of King Uzziah, by Isaiah, 2 Chron. xxvi. 22.

books we now possess are perfect and unmutilated. But to what extent they may have been affected by these circumstances, it is impossible for us to estimate.

In the preceding general statement, the reader can easily comprehend the various circumstances that have tended to impair the integrity of the Old Testament writings, and in that fact, which must have been evident anciently, as well as now; he can perceive the reasonableness of supposing that recensions of the text have been made, from time to time, by persons of credit among the Jews, even at very remote periods. It was by such persons, therefore, that those explanatory passages or glosses were made, which though now inserted in the text, yet speak for themselves, that they do not belong to it. These passages at first, were probably included in parenthetical marks, or were written in the margin, but which since those early times, having lost the marks of their peculiar distinctions, have become blended with the text, either from the haste or the ignorance of transcribers. Though many of such interpolations are sufficiently notorious, there are possibly others that do not clearly discover themselves, though they are much suspected; such as several quotations from the book of Jasher; the book of the Wars of the Lord, &c.*

The New Testament, whose number of books was completed

*I feel the strongest inclination to refer to some ancient recension of the Scripture, the relation of a circumstance in the book of Genesis which has been the source of no small cavil with the deists, and of no small perplexity to Christian commentators.

In Genesis, chapter xii., we are informed that Abraham went down into Egypt, where Pharaoh, the Egyptian prince, deprived him of his wife. In Genesis, chapter xx., a relation is made of a similar act of injustice, on the part of Abimilech, king of Gerar, under the perplexing circumstance that Sarah was at this time, according to the chronologists, ninety years of age. I apprehend the relations are of one single event, and not two as commonly considered. In making some early recension of the Pentateuch, I presume, the editor had seen two different relations of Abraham's history, in one of which, the prince who fell in love with Sarah, was termed king of Gerar, which was a Philistine country; and in the other account, which was equally true, he was termed a Pharaoh, or prince of Egypt, *for that country was then held in subjection by the Philistines who were the Shepherd kings.*—The editor, or commentator, being ignorant of the fact, that they were the same, and finding in the ancient books this event related, apparently of two different princes, and one more full in its statement than the other, has inserted them both. I feel disposed, with the least encouragement from the learned world, to cancel the part of the twelfth chapter, from the ninth verse to the end, and to bring in its place the whole of the twentieth chapter, and the latter part of the twenty-first chapter, from the twenty-second verse, which I apprehend has been displaced from its true connection.

In so doing, we shall be justified in the important fact, that the Philistines did hold Egypt in subjection at this time. and we get rid of the great difficulty of accounting how Abimilech should fall in love with a woman ninety years of age.

about seventy years after the crucifixion, though not exposed to the same amount of accident as those of the older volume, have nevertheless been exposed to many injuries. The Christian world for several centuries suffered under great calamities, whether as arising from the persecution of the heathens,* the destructive consequences of civil commotions, and the terrible desolations induced by those various barbarian nations that overthrew the Roman empire.

We are not aware that any book of the New Testament writers has been lost, unless it may be an Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, and one to the Laodiceans. But it is very possible, that other apostles have written epistles of which we have no account.

The transcribing of the New Testament has been attended with all those errors of which we have spoken in the preceding page, and which are inseparable from all manuscript writing.

Though there may appear to be some reason to charge some persons with the crime of having attempted to corrupt certain passages of the New Testament, yet as those corruptions appear but in very few ancient MSS.; and may be explained in their origin, without any imputation of moral obliquity, I think we are bound to consider them as having happened by accident. Such passages however are not involved with any selfish doctrine to the benefit of men, but concern abstract doctrines of theology of no practical importance.

Having now stated those causes which have occasioned our copies of the Bible to vary, to a greater or less degree, from the original publications, we shall now exhibit those circumstances that have tended to their preservation, so that we can be enabled to estimate the probability, that they have suffered so little, that we can rely on them as being substantially correct, and conformable in their substance and meaning to the first exemplars.

Besides the copies of the Hebrew Scripture, we have others in the Samaritan language, which claim an antiquity possibly anterior to the rebellion of Jeroboam, B. C. 990, but at any rate, not since the times of Nehemiah, B. C. 440, for the sectarian hatred of the Jews and Samaritans, was sufficient to keep the one from borrowing any thing from the other after that time. The mutual agreement of these two versions of the Scripture from this early time, in all their substantial exhibitions, and their particular agreement, except in small historic points, or critical readings, guarantee the integrity of the Scripture text of the Old Testament to a very remote antiquity.

*During the persecution of Diocletian, which lasted ten years, a most diligent search was made after the books and papers of the Christians, and all that were found were committed to the flames. Mosheim i. 72.

Nearly three hundred years before Christ, the Pentateuch and some other books of the Hebrew Scriptures, were translated into Greek, for the benefit of the Jews who used that language. Though the pure Hebrew of the Scriptures had become a dead language to the bulk of the Jewish nation at this time, there was still a sufficient knowledge of the Hebrew possessed by the more learned Jews, to enable them to translate the Scriptures into Greek, as well and correctly as it may be supposed possible to translate one living into another living language. This translation of the Septuagint, as it is called, is of immense importance, as enabling us to determine, with greater precision, the significance of many Hebrew words and idioms, as well as to correct any errors that may have occurred since that time in the Hebrew text.

With the preaching of Christianity, a further solicitude was exerted both for the preservation of the Hebrew text, and the precision of its significance, for one great and important proof of the divine appointment of Christianity, arose from the fulfilment of the predictions announced by Moses and other prophets of the Old Testament, and which were constantly referred to both by Jews and Christians, in the important controversies of the first two or three centuries.

There have been many causes that tended to preserve the true text of the New Testament Scriptures. Immediately after the promulgation of these writings, translations of them were made into Syriac, Latin, Arabic, Coptic, &c. which not only have preserved the true principles and doctrines of the Gospel, but we are enabled, through this variety of translations, to comprehend with more distinctness, the real significance of the idiomatic phrases and hebraisms, which abound in the Greek writings of the evangelists and apostles.

We have also a further mean of verifying the correctness of our present copies of the New Testament, by an examination of the disputatious writings of those persons denominated the Fathers, who, being engaged in a continual theological warfare with one another, or with the many schismatic teachers of the first five or six centuries, in this manner furnish us with a multitude of quotations from the New Testament, by which we can largely determine the accuracy of our copies as compared with those used by them.

But as we have abundantly proved the Scripture writings to be free from any imputation of fraudulent or wilful corruption, the most effectual process by which the integrity of the text may be established, is from that collation of the ancient manuscripts and

versions, which has been so extensively put in execution during the last century, and is continually applied whenever any new opportunity is offered. By this very extensive collation, and the publication by various scholars, of the different readings observed between them, we have learned in the most satisfactory manner, that the Scripture writings are free from any confusion or mistake upon every subject relating to our moral or religious obligations. Some important corrections on historical subjects, some clearer expression of particular passages, have undoubtedly been made, and some interpolations have been detected, but it is an undeniable truth that this laborious investigation of the ancient manuscripts and versions, instead of affecting the integrity of the Scripture text, has established its substantial accuracy beyond all dispute.

Having thus fairly exhibited the true history of the biblical text, having stated the accidents to which it has been subjected, as well as those agencies that have tended to its preservation, let us now consider the Bible in a closer and more interesting light, *to wit*: the amount of inspiration with which we must regard its language and communications.

We have already stated that the Bible itself is not a revelation from Jehovah, but is the history of a revelation made by him to mankind, which has been recorded by human hands. Those individuals, who were commissioned by Jehovah to make such communications, not only proclaimed it with their mouths, but have written it with their hands, or dictated it to secretaries.

As to the actual amount of inspiration with which their communications were made originally, whether these were only substantially in the truth of the message communicated, or so plenary as to affect even the very words and letters, I cannot come to a positive determination, though I prefer the opinion that their inspiration was only substantial in declaring a true message.

But, however this may have been *originally*, at the time when prophets and apostles preached, or when their autographs existed, it must be abundantly evident that we of the present day, can only regard the Scriptures, whether of the Old or New Testament, but as being substantially inspired. This must be clear from our previous discourse, where we have shown the accidents to which the Scripture text has been subjected, that not only involve the possibility of the omission of words and passages, the interpolation of words and passages, the inadvertent mistakes of copyists, but many difficulties also exist as to our critical idiomatic perception of the precise import and signification of words and passages, and hence it is

impossible that we can contend for any plenary inspiration. But we can, without any difficulty, contend for the inspired truth of the *message* communicated by prophets and apostles, and the substantial doctrines urged by them.

According to this view, it will be perceived, that we consider the amount of knowledge that we receive from the Scriptures, is conveyed *in the substance* of the message or communication there recorded, and that it is to be understood in the ordinary significance of language, and not in technical words or expressions; and if this be the case, which I hold to be indisputable, I apprehend that the divine message is as fully expressed by our common translation, as it is either in the Hebrew or Greek originals.

However much men may talk of the original Scriptures, it is the translations alone that enlighten and influence modern society, for generally speaking, neither clergy nor laity, are able to comprehend them in the ancient languages.* It is the English translation alone, that is used for doctrine, instruction, and reproof, wherever the English language is spoken, and as I contend that it communicates the whole substance of the inspired message that God has communicated to mankind, so there is a propriety that I should exhibit its actual value, before I proceed to state what I apprehend are the true doctrines of the Scripture.

The English translation, made by a number of learned and pious men, two hundred years ago, from the best printed editions of the Hebrew and Greek Bibles, and possibly with the assistance of a few ancient manuscripts, was very faithfully and honestly executed. But not having the advantage of the immense collation of manuscripts and versions, that have been made since that time, it is in sundry places undoubtedly different from what would be considered a more correct text at the present day. Several words and passages in our present translation ought accordingly to be stricken out, and many suppletory words might be added, as well as others be omitted, in order to make a more correct sense. No change, however, could be made that would weaken or impugn the simplicity of gospel truth in the least degree. It would alone remove some blem-

*It may, perhaps, be worth while to remark, that this has been the case at all times since the foundation of Christianity. Few of the ancient Greek fathers understood Hebrew, and few of the Latin fathers understood either Hebrew or Greek. Though they have been canonized as saints, and nursing fathers to the church, yet they only understood the Scriptures by means of translations into the vulgar tongues. St. Augustine himself, though so eminent as a Doctor of Theology, and of such high authority in the Romish church, as father Simon has frequently observed, knew but very little of Greek, and nothing at all of Hebrew.—*Histoire Critique*, V. T. 387, 398.

ishes of text and expression. And as soon as it may be considered that the ancient manuscripts and versions have been sufficiently collated, the present English translation should be revised by competent and pious men, and an edition be published whereby the unlearned may receive the full benefit of those labors which so many eminently learned Christians have bestowed on the subject.

The only sources of error to which the mere English readers of our common translation are liable, are two: First, in considering that our version is an exact translation of the Scriptures, literally such as they were revealed from God to man, and secondly, in supposing that our English words contain the very force and technical meaning of the Hebrew or Greek text.

With respect to the first of these subjects, we have already shown that we have not a true copy of the Scriptures as originally written. There is no one standard text or copy to be found any where. The best text is only to be ascertained from the concurring testimony of the most ancient and most carefully written manuscripts and versions, aided by a sound critical judgment, and the evident sense and context of the passages. This process necessarily implies much labor and study, and a long time may elapse before the literal text of the Scripture shall be put into an unexceptionable condition.

In the second place, our English words, with few exceptions, rarely convey the precise signification of the Hebrew or Greek words. They sometimes exceed, and sometimes fall short of the exact meaning of the original text, and it is impossible to translate idiomatic phrases but by an unavoidable circumlocution.

But, nevertheless, there is no doubt but that the English translation communicates to us the full sense of the divine revelation, expressed in the idiom of our own forms of speech.

The only real advantage that the scholar has over the mere English reader is, the consciousness of his own ignorance of Hebrew and Greek, and of the defects of the translation. This knowledge, instead of enabling him to advance doctrines with greater authority, ought to make him much more scrupulous how he determines on the subject, for I believe it will be readily admitted by scholars, that the profoundest Hebrew and Greek scholar living, does not possess any such nice perception of the significance of those languages, as an intelligent youth of fifteen or sixteen years of age did when those languages were living forms of speech.

The wise and the learned owe it to the uneducated to enlighten them on these subjects to the utmost of their ability, and I can see no difficulty in furnishing a translation of the Scripture, which, by a small

critical apparatus, and occasional philological notes, would enable the intelligible English reader to comprehend the Scripture with the precision that may be enjoyed by any scholar. And if the English reader can receive this amount of information, I cannot see why the English translation should not be considered as much the language of inspiration as the mere text of the Hebrew and Greek, which, having been dead languages for so long a period, are only understood through the medium of English words and English ideas, even by those scholars that have imbibed the greatest amount of such literature. And, in like manner, any translation of Scripture faithfully rendered into any other modern language, conveys the substance of the inspired message.

Some persons, perhaps, may be displeased that I have denied our ability to understand the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures with exactness of technical significance. That we cannot so understand them may be made evident by this simple fact: we are unable, in the majority of instances, to know what bird, what beast, what plant, what mineral, what particular substance, is actually meant in the Scripture writings, and if we are ignorant on such points, more than as to a general comprehension, how can it be possible we can have the rigorous technical sense of an abstract word, term, or phrase, that involves a metaphysical, ethical, or philosophical significance. We can discern the substantial meaning clearly; as a technical one we cannot.

It must be evident, from the exposition we have made, that there can be no argument maintained on the absolute amount of inspiration of the Bible text, whether in the Samaritan, Hebrew, or Greek languages, any more than we can maintain such a doctrine on our English translation. All we can maintain is, that the volume is substantially inspired, but not so *verbatim et literatim*; for the numerous causes that we have stated to have affected the Scripture writings, added to the utter impossibility of ascertaining the precise import and significance of many words, and the nice peculiarities of idiom, that can only be completely understood by the instructed native born citizen, and never are acquired by foreigners, must entirely debar any one of our day from pleading the inspired significance of any word which is to be used technically. Of whole passages a less amount of difficulty exists, yet, nevertheless, it does exist to such a degree, that though the substance of the passage may be clearly discerned, yet it must be ever attended with a greater or less degree of uncertainty as to its *absolute* and positively restricted meaning.

I apprehend, however, the conclusion to which we have brought this section, may require me to add an observation of great importance that may set the mind of any one at ease, who may feel dissatisfied with my having impugned the plenary inspiration of the Scripture text.

The Scripture of the Old Testament, as quoted by our Saviour and the apostles, is far less frequently quoted *verbatim* than in its substance or sense. They have farther quoted indifferently from the Hebrew Scriptures, or from the Greek translation of the seventy.

In a great many instances they rather allude to the Old Scripture than quote; so that their practice abundantly shows, that even in the discharge of their inspired function, the sense or substantial truth of Jehovah's previously inspired communication was alone the matter of essential importance. And, indeed, I know of but one single passage in the whole Scripture quotations of the Old Testament made by our Saviour or his apostles, that implies any particular value in the very words themselves, viz. where he uses the absolute sense of the words, *I am the God* of Abraham, Isaac, &c. in his reply to the Sadducees, as a proof of the then actual existence of the souls of Abraham, &c., (Mark xii. 26, 27,) and which, if Christ had not thus quoted, I see not how we could have made any such inference.* But this, I believe, is the only instance in the Scripture, while in every other quotation Christ and his apostles have alone referred to the previously inspired Scripture, sometimes literally, but much more frequently only in substance. Now I think we have no difficulty in undertaking to say, we can guarantee the inspired substance of every part of Scripture necessary to our salvation.

To show how easy a matter it is to assure ourselves of the absolute correctness with which the moral or religious doctrines of the Scripture have been preserved to our day, we shall state the subject in a very simple form, and which I trust will be satisfactory.

We are taught in the Scripture, that we owe our existence to Jehovah, who rules and governs all things by a general and particular providence. He has set our duties before us, whether as regards himself or our fellow creatures, in the most intelligible language, and he has informed us how we may expiate our sins when we break his commandments.

These matters constitute the substance of the Scriptures, and

* Archbishop Tillotson considers that Christ used these words to the Sadducees as the *argumentum ad hominem* rather than as being of direct authority.

with these substantial revelations every portion of the biblical writings is in perfect accord, not only as a whole system, but in every particular of special doctrine.

Hence it is impossible that the Scriptures can have been in any way perverted or corrupted, as to their communication of the revelations of Jehovah, for the whole volume is consistent throughout, and not a single precept or doctrine is anomalous to, or varies from, the fundamental principles that give rise to its numerous expositions and details.

Under the above expression, therefore, sustained by the evidence of an immense collation of manuscripts, and all other legitimate sources by which we can investigate the integrity of the text, there can be no reason, whatever, to withhold an unhesitating belief, that there is nothing either wanting or corrupted in the Scripture writings, that is useful, much less that is essential to our religious salvation.

Having now sufficiently laid before the reader the history of the mere literal text of the Scripture, I shall now proceed to make an exhibition of the doctrines, which I apprehend the Scriptures do clearly communicate to us for our religious instruction.

CHAPTER XII.

EXPOSITION OF THE ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

THE Creator of all things, who has revealed himself by the name of Jehovah, has commissioned divers persons, at sundry times, to inform mankind, that, those who will obey and serve him, according to his requirements, he will bless, and finally make them immortal in unchangable happiness. But that if men will disregard or disobey his appointments, he will visit them with an indignation and displeasure that shall have no end.

The service that Jehovah requires of us, is, that we shall, as free agents, observe all his commandments and prohibitions as set forth in the Scriptures, not with any uncertain amount of obedience, but with our whole heart, and soul, and strength.

But as Jehovah, in the revelation he has made mankind, recognizes our infirmity and weakness, to keep his law with an absolutely perfect obedience, so he has promised, that when we do transgress against his commandments, that he will nevertheless forgive our disobedience and receive us into favor, if we will, with sincere penitence, confess our fault, and use that propitiation for transgression, which he has appointed.

This propitiation for sin, under the Christian dispensation, is in appealing to the mystical death or sacrifice of the Messiah, which has been announced to us as being sufficient in the sight of Jehovah, to atone for the sin of the whole human race.

But Jesus, the Christ or Messiah, in addition to the mere fact of having made a propitiation for our sin, exists in a glorified state our mediator and intercessor before Jehovah, in the attitude of a high-priest, and possessing that function so exclusively, that there is no attainment of pardon and salvation, but through the mystic agency of his priestly office and power.

And, finally, having thus access to Jehovah, through Jesus, the Christ, our sins are not only pardoned, but we receive from him spiritual influences, by which we not only are enabled to discern

with greater correctness our obligations and duties, but we also receive an increase of moral ability, to enable us to perform our duties.

But that the reader may fully appreciate the exposition I have thus made of the doctrines of Christianity, I must call his attention to the important circumstance, so much insisted upon by us in a former page, and which, in truth, constitutes the great theory of the Christian religion, viz. that man is undergoing intellectual and moral probation or discipline before Jehovah, under the theory of Christianity, as a free agent, in his individual capacity alone.

In our former observations, it was not then necessary for us to enumerate the particulars of the theory of our Christian probation, but the time has now arrived that we should do so with all distinctness. To what was stated at page 12, it is now necessary to add, that our probationary discipline is not accomplished simply through the agencies of our own natural perceptions and powers, but that we are surrounded by spiritual influences, which have an action upon us through the medium of our own inclinations and will. Thus, as the influences of the spirit of Jehovah, by suggestions and co-operations, tend to exalt us, on the one hand, to a perfection that is above the ability of mere human nature to accomplish, so by suggestions and co-operations of the evil spirit, termed Satan, or the adversary, we are, on the other hand, encouraged and facilitated in our evil courses, until we ultimately become more evil and depraved than we would have been from the mere infirmity of human nature alone.

It is sufficient to call the reader's attention to the above peculiarities of our probationary constitution. To discuss and vindicate the facts suitably, would require more space than the nature of our work permits.

The doctrines I have now laid down, as the essentials of the Christian faith, are taught us either typically or directly, from the beginning to the end of the Scripture. They are not only formally communicated to us as being of divine authority, but they are the absolute scope and substance of all the reasoning and argument, wherever the inspired messengers illustrate or vindicate the scheme of Jehovah to mankind.

These doctrines do not stand upon the technical signification of words or passages, but are simple communications, repeated it may be in a hundred different places of the Scripture, and are just as plain and intelligible, I apprehend, to the mere English reader of the common translation, as they were to those individuals who received the annunciation of these doctrines from the mouths of the prophets and apostles themselves.

Of the truth of these doctrines, as depending on the absolute veracity and moral credibility of the messengers of Jehovah, we have already exhibited abundant proof; and of the substantial correctness of our translation with the revelations originally made, it is impossible to doubt, seeing the amount of testimony we have produced from all sources, confirming a system that unvaryingly calls for universal benevolence, and unlimited moral responsibility in the discharge of every duty, in which human nature possibly can be concerned.

Whatever other persons may think of the exhibition I have thus made of the fundamental principles of Christianity, I feel satisfied that no individual is warranted to state them in terms less broad, and which I apprehend, must be approved of by the majority of Christian sects, for I have alone insisted upon doctrines, that, with the exception of the Socinians, perhaps all other Christian churches will recognize as being essential to our salvation. That individual Christians may have a more determinate view of the significance of these doctrines for themselves, is their indisputable right, but I consider it to be an exercise of intellectual responsibility that concerns individuals alone as conscientious beings before their Creator, who will judge them as to any proper or improper exercise of their faculties before him in these particulars. For we must never forget that we are *intellectual*, as well as *moral creatures*, undergoing trial before Jehovah, and that intellectual sin may be as clearly exhibited by our presumptuous doctrines, as it may be in our want of faith as to those particulars that have been actually revealed to us.

In attempting to ascertain the foundations of our faith and practice as laid down in the Scripture, I have sufficiently shown that it is unjustifiable for us to build any doctrine upon technical meanings of words and passages, or upon single and unsupported passages, but that we must alone ascertain our faith and practice from the evident scope and argument of the Scriptures, which, though establishing certain principles, are more or less general in their expression, and scarcely, if ever, are restricted by the limits of any positive definition. And the omission of any technical or rigorous precision on such subjects, is in exact keeping with the theory of our intellectual probation, for it is our duty to exhibit in our faith and practice, the utmost amount of an intellectual, conscientious, and willing obedience to the requirements of Jehovah, as free agents, undergoing moral discipline before him. Hence there are certain matters announced in the Scriptures, which not to believe, would manifest either a want of honesty, or that we cherished unjustifiable

opinions which oppose the revelation of Jehovah. And again, there are matters which the Scriptures have introduced into our religious system, which for a man to frame into doctrines, argues presumption and self-conceit, in attempting to pass those boundaries, which our Creator has prescribed to human capacity. Every reflecting man must, therefore, be aware that as intellectual beings of limited capacities, undergoing a probation before the Almighty Maker of all things on the ground of an honest application of our whole capacities to a special subject, our condition is such that we are as likely to err in professing to believe too much, as we are in not believing what we ought.

It is, therefore, with great caution, that I have announced what I think to be the essential doctrines of Christianity, nor do I think it justifiable for any one not writing as a sectarian, to state them less broadly. These general principles, I think the Scripture authorises us to state very clearly, though I admit most distinctly, that men may differ very conscientiously as to the precise manner in which these general doctrines may be understood. Let every one consider St. Paul's caution to the Corinthians on this subject, "This is the foundation, let every man be careful how he builds thereon."

As I apprehend the statement I have made of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, are sufficiently intelligible to any one who is the least instructed in the Scripture writings, I shall offer no commentary on them as an entire system. But as I have found that not only sceptics, but even many Christians, are involved in perplexity on the subject of our Salvation through Faith, and of the influences of the Holy Spirit, I shall attempt to show, by a plain exposition, how rational and intelligible these doctrines are, when they are fairly laid before an intelligent reader.

On Salvation by Faith.

There is no doctrine of the Christian religion, that seems to have perplexed the sceptical, and the deistical, more than the one which teaches "our salvation is of faith, through Jesus Christ." Though the difficulty of such persons, in not comprehending this prime dogma of Christianity, arises in some measure from their great ignorance of the theory and scope of the biblical writings, yet it cannot be denied, that another portion of their perplexity must be ascribed to the confused, not to say inconsistent notions, that many theologians have promulgated upon this most important doctrine.*

*The only error that I will notice, is one of logic or metaphysics, and which arises from the false notions that men have on the subject of *abstract*

To bring the subject fairly before the reader, let us consider the enunciation of this dogma, "*Our salvation is of faith, in or through Jesus Christ.*" Here are two particulars to be considered, *first*, the meaning and import of salvation, and *secondly*, how this salvation is attained through Jesus Christ. Let us examine these subjects in due order, and first of the meaning and import of salvation.

The word salvation means being saved or delivered; now from what is the Christian saved, or delivered? Why we are saved, or delivered, from the infliction or endurance of those judgments that God has denounced against our sins, or in other words, against our breaches of his commandments.

As the theory of our salvation through Jesus Christ is therefore, *remedial* of our disobedience to the commandments of Jehovah, let us briefly exhibit the nature of the requirements of his law, for without we understand this subject, we cannot discern how *the remedy* is to be applied.

It is unnecessary to make an exhibition of the law of God in its various details, it is sufficient to state in general terms, that it requires certain services from us, and certain things we are forbidden to do. Certain of these acts involve our religious obedience to Jehovah as our God, and certain acts constitute our duty to our fellow creatures. But our duties, whether to God or man, are not required of us in any indeterminate measure or proportion, they are required of us to the utmost exertion and obedience of our whole intellectual and moral powers, *viz.* Thou shalt love, (i. e. serve with devout regard,) the Lord thy God, with *all* thy heart, and with *all* thy mind, and with *all* thy strength. And thou shalt love, (i. e. regard by the same rule,) thy neighbor as thy self.

It is, therefore, evident that we commit sin before Jehovah, not only in any actual breach of his commandments, but also whenever we fail to exert the utmost amount of our strength and obedience, and in so failing, we become liable to all those punishments that he has denounced against sin.

But, notwithstanding the peremptory conditions under which we

ideas. The theologians have, perhaps, universally spoken of faith, as an abstraction which is impossible and absurd. There is no such abstraction as faith. Our acts of faith are all *particular*, *viz.* we have faith in Jehovah's promises, we have faith in the influences of his spirit, we have faith in the atonement and power of our Lord Jesus Christ. But no man can consolidate all these several acts of faith into *one definition*. Yet the theologians almost always attempt it, and the consequence is they are absolutely unintelligible to every one who has not a practical knowledge of the subject, by which he can dispense with their definitions.

are thus required to observe and keep the law of God, he has, nevertheless, made provision for the imperfection and weakness of human nature, by having appointed, ever since the fall of our first parents, a mode by which we may have our sins against his law forgiven, and which, under the fulness of the Christian dispensation, is stated to be by resorting to the atonement and intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The whole theory of the Christian religion is, that we keep the law of God in all its requirements, such as he has enjoined it upon us, and that when we sin or transgress against his commandments, we must, with all sincere contrition, repent of our sin, and ask Jehovah to pardon us through the atonement and intercession of Jesus Christ. This he has promised to accept, and not only so, but that he will bestow the influences of his spirit upon us, and will assist and enable us to keep his law more perfectly for the future.

I do not see how it is possible to state the doctrine of our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, more clear than this, more simple in its enunciation, or more intelligible in the manner of its application. Nevertheless, let us enlarge a little, so that it be impossible to misunderstand the subject.

Faith in Jesus Christ does not mean that a man shall intellectually admit that he was the Messiah, that he died for the sins of mankind, and that he shall hereafter judge both the quick and the dead. A man that only believes this, alone believes or admits the truth of *the theory* of the office of Jesus Christ, but he does not believe in him as set forth in the New Testament.

When the apostles tell us to have faith, or to believe in Jesus Christ, it implies not only a belief *in the theory* of his office, (that the devils had,) but that we cherish a full undoubted belief or confidence that he can and will save those, who put their trust in him, from the punishments denounced against our transgressions, and that he can and will raise us from the dead, to a state of everlasting life and blessedness.

Therefore, we are instructed to place our whole hope and trust in his all sufficient power to save; Jesus Christ can and will save us, if we will but seek his salvation, and follow his directions.

If we do all this, then we have faith, or believe in Jesus Christ as is required by the apostolic writers.

I cannot conceive how it is possible to express this doctrine in clearer terms, than it has been stated in the Scriptures, and yet notwithstanding its simplicity, there has arisen among the theologians a

controversy on another subject, which they have made to re-act upon the theory of our salvation in Jesus Christ, that not only confounds the understanding, but has even in certain instances, more or less, set it aside, and has substituted a false doctrine in its place. This controversy has proceeded from a discussion of the actual value of good works, whether as involving the scheme of our salvation itself, or as acts of obligation on us, essential to our salvation.

Those who have taken sides in this controversy, apparently are exceedingly opposed to each other. The one quote St. Paul, as affirming that we are saved alone through the grace of God, altogether irrespective of our works, and therefore, they say, that good works are not essential to salvation. The other party contend that good works are necessary to our salvation, from the whole drift of the apostolic writings, so that we cannot be saved without them, and consequently they are meritorious before God.

Either of these opinions, as literally interpreted, is erroneous, but when they are properly understood in their Scripture foundations they are both correct, that is, they are but one and the same thing.

Nevertheless, the error of each party proceeds from different sources, the first, from not understanding what St. Paul means by the phrase, *we are saved by the grace of God, and not by works*, and the second party to the controversy, have erred by not understanding what is the true nature of good works.

Let us, therefore, in the first place, understand the argument and reasoning of St. Paul, for if we comprehend this matter aright, the whole controversy will be settled in the most intelligible manner.

St. Paul in proclaiming and vindicating the scheme of our salvation through Jesus Christ, was almost wholly engaged in contending against the notions of the Jews, whether unbelieving or Christian, as to an observance of the laws and institutions of Moses, which they considered of the utmost importance. Both Jews, and converted Jews, contended, under the theory of the Realists, that the institutions of the law of Moses were, in themselves, absolutely good and excellent, and as such recommendatory of the observer in the sight of God, who had indeed given an express sanction to them in their original enactments. Hence they taught that men could not be saved unless they were circumcised, and kept all the ceremonial appointments of the Mosaical institutions.

But St. Paul contended, as a Nominalist, that there was nothing *inherently excellent* in the ceremonial law, that it should on that account, *necessarily*, draw down God's favor or blessing on its observance. He contended that whatever blessing or salvation God

had promised to the Jews, if they observed the ceremonial law in former times, was of his *mere grace* alone, and not from any inherent excellence of the institutions or observances themselves.

And surely, this doctrine is alone consistent with every principle of common sense, for since it is impossible that man can do any thing, that *in itself* can be useful or beneficial to God, who has made the world and all things in it, so if God has declared that he will accept any service from man, it is of his *grace alone*, and not for the value or excellence of the work itself, let it be what it may.

St. Paul, therefore, insists upon the fact, that it is impossible for any man to be accepted of his Creator, but by doing those very things that *God has required*, and none other. If a man, therefore, believes that Jehovah will be faithful in his promises, he diligently strives to be acceptable in his sight, by keeping all his commandments; and the blessing or favor of God will be bestowed upon such a person, not because the work or action he may perform is of any *inherent excellence* in itself, and as such grateful to the Deity, but simply in the fact, that it was an act of obedience to the requirement of his maker.*

In former times, urges this great apostle, it is true that Jehovah accepted ceremonial institutions, sacrifices, &c., from the Jewish people, as covenant signs, and as atonement for sin, because he had of his own grace promised so to regard them. But now he has promised to accept and bless all those who, repenting of their sins, seek their salvation through Jesus Christ as the propitiation for sin, and as a mediator and intercessor for the penitent. And this salva-

*Hence the utter absurdity of the theory of those moral deists, as they call themselves, who think they live acceptably before God, by keeping the moral law. Let us admit that they do observe all the requirements of the moral law to as great a perfection as it is possible for man. How does this commend them to Jehovah? They do not observe the moral law *because he has required it*, but because they think it right to so live and act. Hence they cannot expect to be accepted of *him*, because they have not sought *his* favor. The favor of God is alone promised to those who seek it of him according to his requirement. A moral deist, therefore, is a good citizen, and as such he receives his reward, but it is absurd to suppose that Jehovah will reward acts that are not performed specially with a view to his approbation, and as required by his revelation.

What would one say if a man should ask of the king of France, a reward for a service he had rendered to the emperor of China. Is it less ridiculous for a man to suppose that Jehovah will reward actions not performed with a view to his approbation?

But the deist may say that he does not believe in Jehovah; very well,—and where has that God of Nature, that the deists pretend to worship, informed them that he either sees, hears, or regards them? where has he promised to accept their service? See our argument on this head at page 70.

This fearful mistake of the deists, is a consequence of the doctrine of the Realists concerning their eternal and immutable essences.

tion is of the grace or favor of Jehovah, just the same in principle, as it was formerly in the mode of salvation granted to the Jews, and which indeed were actually but types of this very salvation now offered in Jesus Christ.

St. Paul, therefore, says most truly, that we are alone saved by *the grace of God*, for we cannot atone for our sins by any acts of our own device, be they what they may. Salvation, or deliverance from the judgments denounced by Jehovah against our sin, is a boon from God, offered of his own grace, and not a concession to any worship or service, that men may consider to be good and excellent. In other words, Jehovah chooses to pardon and bless the penitent who seeks his favor in the way he has promised to accept; there can be nothing done that can extort this favor from him, and consequently, he is free to dispense his pardon or his favor on whatever terms he may see fit to propose. It becomes the act of our free agency to decide, whether we will accept it or not.

From what has been said, in our preceding observations, I apprehend it will now be an easy matter to determine the relative value of good works, as they are called, in the theory of Christianity.

We are required by the law of God, to serve him with all our mind, and with all our heart, and with all our strength, and to regard the interests of our fellow creatures by the same rule that we do our own:—consequently, if we fail in this perfect service, we commit sin, and to save us from the consequences of this sin, we are to seek the forgiveness of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But, can any one in his senses suppose, that after having had his past sin forgiven him, through the atonement and mediation of Jesus Christ, that he has a dispensation to omit the observance of the law of Jehovah; which formally requires him to maintain every good work, with all his mind, and heart, and strength.

If any one should be at a loss on this subject, let him consider the exhibition made by the Old Testament, that school-master, according to St. Paul, to instruct us concerning Christ. If we examine the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of Leviticus, we shall there find the particular propitiation stated that every penitent must make, when he had transgressed the commandments of Jehovah. *First*, the individual was required to make a penitent confession of his sin, and the necessary restitution or reparation where the case admitted it. *Secondly*, if he then brought an ox, a lamb, two pigeons, or a small quantity of flour, according to his ability, and with them made the appointed propitiation, then Jehovah promised, that "*his sin should be forgiven him.*"

Now did the pardon, which Jehovah accorded to the Jewish penitent after this atonement, release him from a future obedience to a law that required of him a perfect obedience in every good work? Who can suppose any thing so insane? It is just as insane to suppose that the forgiveness of our past sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ, dispenses with the least performance of every good work to our utmost ability.

Good works are required of us in every part of the New Testament, with all earnestness, not as being of any inherent excellence themselves, as imagined by the Realists, but simply because they constitute the very acts of obedient service, that Jehovah has required of us. If we do not good works, then our works are evil, for while we live we must do one or the other, *since there is no living in an intermediate or neutral condition between good and evil works.*

But there are many persons, who really do not know what good works are, for under false systems of philosophy or theology they consider them to be either simple acts of benevolence, such as alms giving, subscribing to, or assisting in charitable or religious undertakings, or in some special system of contrivances that they consider they may either perform or let alone, just as they please, but that when they do perform them with a good intention, that then they are meritorious. But nothing can be more erroneous than such notions, for by the requirement of Jehovah, we are to give alms, and promote the interests of morality and religion, to the utmost extent of our ability as matter of duty, and he that forbears to do so, when he has the ability, is directly guilty of sin. We are required to do all that we can, and every man is able to judge of his ability. He that gives more than his means justify, or attempts to do more than his condition or influence can rationally be expected to accomplish, is a downright fool. Jehovah requires alone what a man can honestly and fairly do under his peculiar circumstances of life, or means, and does not require from him more than is consistent with his power and ability. It is not what we give, or do, that can be acceptable to Jehovah, who made all things by the expression of the words—*Let such things be*: our acceptance with him, is alone in the conscientious and rational employment of the understanding, the affections, or the wealth, *he has given us*: this, and this alone, constitutes our acceptable service.

Seeing then that Jehovah has required the utmost exertion of all our ability, *to wit*, the whole heart, and mind, and strength, as the performance of *mere duty*, so it is utterly impossible that any man can excel himself, or do more good works than his Creator has re-

quired of him as his obedient service, and consequently it is absurd to the last degree, to suppose that we can propitiate for past sin, by undertaking to perform any number of good works.

Having now shown, with sufficient clearness, as I trust, that it is utterly impossible that we can *propitiate* for our past sin or previous disobedience, by undertaking the performance of any superogatory good work, seeing that Jehovah has required all that we can possibly do under that head, as the mere discharge of duty, it, then, cannot excite the least perplexity of mind as to the true value of good works in the theory of our Christian obedience.

Good works constitute the very substance of our Christian existence, they are the very particulars of our duty and obedience, and we are required to perform them with all our heart, and mind, and strength. And when we fail in the discharge of our duty, that is to say in the performance of good works, as all men do more or less frequently in their lives, then we are guilty of sin, and incur all the punishment denounced against sin. From this judgment we may be delivered if we confess our sins with all penitence, and seek the forgiveness of Jehovah through the atonement and instrumentality of Jesus Christ, who has been revealed to us as a propitiation for sin, and as the mediator and intercessor for the penitent.

Though nothing seems to me clearer than the preceding exposition, which is absolutely consistent with the Scripture requirements throughout the volume, yet there seems to be so imperfect a comprehension of the fact by the majority of mankind, that to remove any possible difficulty on this subject, I will exhibit a special detail of circumstances; for instance,

During every day's life, a man has been occupied in a great variety of particulars; his temper has been exercised, his patience, his faith, his hope, his pride, his sensuality, his charity, his benevolence, his long suffering, &c.

Now if he commanded his temper, was patient, was honest, was meek, was temperate, was charitable, was benevolent, was forbearing, &c., his day's life was adorned with all excellence of good works, and if he failed in any of his spiritual or moral duties, i. e. if he was impatient, unfaithful, proud, intemperate, uncharitable, inhuman, passionate, then his works, so far, were evil.

But when a man's conscience informs him that he has sinned, that he has left undone what he ought to have done, and that he has done what he ought not to have done, how is that man to be forgiven his sin? Clearly not by any work that he can do, for Jehovah requires every thing that a man can do, *as bare duty*;

therefore we can be alone forgiven by the favor or mercy of Jehovah, which he has promised us if we will humble ourselves before him, and ask his forgiveness through the merits and intercession of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Therefore, nothing can be clearer than that our salvation is of faith, and is not, neither can be, of works, unless a man should keep the whole law of Jehovah perfectly in all its requirements, throughout all his life, and never transgress or fall short in a single instance, which we need not hesitate to assert is impossible to any finite, and, therefore, necessarily imperfect creature.

There would be no difficulty in properly estimating the scheme of our salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, were not the great majority of men, whether Christian or deist, of the sentiments of the Realists. The Nominalists can have no difficulty whatever in appreciating the truth of the case.

The great bulk of mankind, unhappily, are like Naaman, the Syrian, who refused an easy and simple cure for his leprosy when it was announced to him by the prophet. Fortunately, he had some unconscious Nominalists in his suite, who rationally suggested, that as he would have willingly followed the direction of the prophet if it had been in some great or formal observance, so it would be but rational to obey him in the simple process prescribed. The consequence was, he was cured, not by bathing in Jordan rather than in Pharpar or Abana, but by his *obedience* to the word of Jehovah, delivered through the prophet.

Let every one consider this case of Naaman's, for it well illustrates the principle of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, as announced by the apostolic writers. Whilst the doctrines of the Realists, whether deists or Christians, concerning good works, as matters of salvation, may be as well judged by the unaltered condition of those lepers whom we may suppose, having heard of Naaman's cure, went and bathed as he had done, in the very same place, and in the same manner, and yet without the least benefit, for Jehovah had promised nothing to their formal imitation.

From what we have previously said, it would appear evident that we can render no acceptable service to Jehovah in any system of religious service of our own devising. All we can do is, to perform those things that he has required of us, whether our performance be moral or ceremonial.

But nevertheless, it is clearly evident from the Scriptures, that the mere performance of the moral or ceremonial duties required by Jehovah is not an acceptable service before him. He requires the intellect and the affections to be entirely interested in our obedience,

and he that falls short in this particular, falls short of that spiritual perfection which man is capable of accomplishing, and which is required of us to the highest state of exertion which our natures are capable of making in the present life.

To serve the Lord our God with all the heart, with all the mind, and with all our strength, we must be wholly interested in his service, we must aim at accomplishing his spiritual purposes, not only in purifying ourselves from every thing that may be evil, but to walk before him in all tenderness of conscience, doing nothing, thinking nothing presumptuous, neither mistrusting the promises of God, but with all meekness, whether of intellect or carriage, to discharge our duties fearlessly and regardless of the opposition or prejudices of men, or of any circumstances of trial by which we may be surrounded.

Our endeavor, therefore, must be, to have our intellect and affections in their healthiest state of excitement, progressing in a continual moral improvement towards perfection, in a direction equally free from presumption or imbecility.

And we have every encouragement to induce us to aim at the perfection that is thus implied, for Jehovah himself has promised his spiritual influences to assist all those who will seek his mercy and favor with honest minds. As this subject of spiritual influence involves the very essence and theory of our progress towards Christian perfection, it is proper that we should express ourselves on this doctrine distinctly and clearly.

On the Influences of the Spirit of God.

There is no doctrine taught more expressly in the Scriptures, than that Jehovah imparts to the minds and consciences of those who obey and fear him, a spiritual influence, which, as a new principle of intellectual illumination, enables them to go onwards in the perfecting of their moral nature.

How, and in what manner this Spirit of Jehovah operates on, or influences the human soul, we do not pretend to understand; all that we contend for, is, its truth as a matter of fact, and which, in its theory, there is no difficulty of comprehending.*

Though we cannot presume to make conjectures on this subject, nor to assign the limitations under which the Spirit of Jehovah may

* Lord Bolingbroke has observed that "an extraordinary action of God upon the human mind, which the word inspiration is now used to denote, is not more inconceivable than the ordinary action of mind on body or body on mind."—Horne, *Introd. to Scriptures*, i. 2.

be supposed to influence the mind or the consciences of mankind, yet, as far as I can comprehend the Scriptures, I should apprehend it is not bestowed upon man without the individual is sincerely desirous of knowing the truth, and makes a greater or less amount of honest exertion to attain that knowledge. With those who thus exert themselves, the Spirit of Jehovah co-operates freely, and leads them into ways of righteousness and truth. I further apprehend that the consciences of men are never overpowered by any supernatural inpouring of divine light, which thus converts the individual whether he will or not.

Neither is this spiritual influence given to any one sensibly in a moment of time, but it is communicated imperceptibly and gradually, enabling the recipient to increase his exertions, which shall be rewarded with further spiritual influences, and greater spiritual discernment and power. This condition of things is never susceptible of a termination, but lasts during natural life, unless the individual, forbearing to exert himself, falls into sin, and does what is technically called, grieve the Spirit of Jehovah. Then these influences are either diminished or wholly withdrawn, for the influences of Jehovah's Spirit are not given to release a man from moral and intellectual exertions, as if he had become "a free man," but they add to the weight of his moral responsibilities; on the evident principle that he who has much, of him shall much be required, and the more he receives, the greater amount of intellectual and moral exertion shall be demanded from him.

Hence the regenerated Christian is ever undergoing a purifying discipline before Jehovah as long as his powers remain capable of improvement, and he is just as obnoxious to transgress and grieve the Spirit of God in his latter day, as at the commencement of his spiritual life. That is to say, not that he would, perhaps, offend in the same things as at first, but that he may offend in other matters, that, in spiritual transgression, are equivalent in amount of offence to the offences of a less perfect and regenerate life.

With this subject as a matter of improvement, we have no present concern, and we therefore forbear to dilate upon the doctrine. It may be sufficient alone to say, that pride and self-conceit seem to be the vices of the spiritual, as they are of the natural world, which indeed, as founded on the common constitution of humanity, ought naturally to be attended with similar phenomena. Hence the apostles so continually caution believers not to be high-minded, but to fear, to be humble before God, and to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, lest they should fall from their moral estate and condition.

And I do believe that as many fall from the higher states of spiritual life as from the lesser degrees, not indeed into reprobation, but into conditions far inferior to what they ought to have attained, and thus shall fail in the reward promised by Jehovah to those who shall serve him with a perfect mind. Now as to matters of immorality in life or conversation, it is needless to speak, for, on this subject, every one is fully instructed, but concerning those things which more immediately are connected with cherishing or grieving the influences of God's Spirit, I am sure many do fail from not rightly appreciating their natural condition, as well as their spiritual standing in the holy things of Jehovah.

Such persons I would more especially put in mind, that they neither do, nor profess any thing that is not distinctly of faith before God. That they neither profess, in the sight of Jehovah, nor man, to believe, or do things, as matters of religious duty, that stand upon the basis of human authority. If a doctrine is incomprehensible, admit that it is so; if it is ambiguous, confess it; if it is clearly true, believe and perform it; if it is indifferent, let it be so acknowledged; and if it be hurtful, testify against it. Let all this be done in the spirit of honesty, and charity, and let Jehovah take care of the issue.

But, if any man does not discharge his duty, in these particulars, with all honesty, before Jehovah, he grieves the Spirit of God, for himself, and his doctrines become an offence to his fellow-man, against which proceeding we have the very condemnation of Christ himself.* Now, this offence, of which Christ speaks, is not simply in promulgating an erroneous doctrine, it is equally so in vindicating or allowing to pass without disapprobation, any doctrine or practice, that is either not true in itself, or being of no importance is nevertheless so esteemed by others. For any thing, in religious worship, that is not of faith is sin, and by such procedure the Spirit of God is grieved, perhaps withdrawn, and strong delusion falls on the man to believe at last the thing that he once disbelieved, and account it a matter of grace and favor, when it may be the direct consequence of Jehovah's withdrawing his spiritual influences.

*"Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man, by whom the offence cometh." Math. xviii. 7. Plain as this text is, I have met with some that did not understand it. It may, therefore, be expedient to state that the term *offence*, does not mean any thing *displeasing* to religious people, but the *misleading* those who were desirous of serving Jehovah correctly.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF CERTAIN DOCTRINES HELD IN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES, THAT ARE
EITHER PRESUMPTUOUS, OR DESTITUTE OF SUFFICIENT SCRIPTURE
WARRANT.

As the author of an Essay, addressed to the sceptical, or to the half instructed in the scheme of our religious belief, I cannot terminate my vindication of Christianity, without attempting to remove several objections, on the part of such persons, that arise from the prevalence of certain dogmas, advanced by many religious sects, as being doctrines taught by the Scriptures. There are many dogmas promulgated among various Christian associations, which are not only unscriptural, but, I apprehend, are, in certain instances, directly contrary to the Scripture. There are other doctrines that have a semblance of Scripture warrant, but which are determined by the theologians much too rigorously as to their precise significance; and again, other doctrines that are undoubtedly scriptural, have had technical significations attached to them, that can only be decided by the responsibilities of individual conscience, for they are of such a nature, that it is hardly possible for men to write or discourse on them without saying too much or too little.

Before I commence with the consideration of such particulars, as above mentioned, I must observe, that although our Creator has made a revelation to mankind through prophets and apostles, as recorded in the Bible, yet he has not become the less inscrutable in his nature and purposes, than before those revelations were made. He has only informed us of what he requires from us as duty, and how we may make propitiation for our sin, when we transgress his commandments, but he has not revealed to us any of the secrets of his council, nor condescended to justify the proceeding of any of his ways.

But though Jehovah be thus inscrutable to us, it has ever been the vice of the human mind to attempt to penetrate into his purpose, and to show that his scheme is evident to our comprehension. The extreme absurdity of this presumptuous proceeding, which is too apparent with the great body of professing Christians, I will attempt

to exhibit, in a very brief statement, prefatory to the ensuing discourse upon the unscriptural or presumptuous doctrines taught in the Christian churches, for I am confident that the greatest sources of false doctrine in the world has proceeded from the circumstance that a great aim of most theological teaching has been to show, that Jehovah is not unfathomable in his nature and purposes.

The atheist disputes the existence and providence of God, because he thinks that no wise or good man would manage the affairs of the universe in a similar manner, and the deist and Christian can only obviate the force of the atheistical argument, by rationally contending that the God who made all things is not a man, but a Being who is inscrutable to the finite creatures he has made. Here, then, it is distinctly urged, both by Christian and deist, *that God is inscrutable*. If he then be inscrutable, he should be so considered in all our speculations.

Yet we shall immediately find the deist, who has admitted the inscrutability of God in the atheistical controversy, attacks Christianity on the ground, that such and such doctrines of Christianity are inconsistent with the perfections of God—as if any one knew in what the perfections of God do consist. Before the deist makes this objection against Christianity, he ought to vindicate God's providence from the censure of the atheist.

The Christian, hard pressed by the objections of the deist, find a refuge still in the inscrutable nature of the Deity, and terms his antagonist presumptuous in undertaking to speak as if God was to be comprehended like man.

And yet, in unfolding some sectarian scheme or other of the Christian religion, the Christian talks of God's plans and purposes, as if he was really *not inscrutable*, and undertakes to vindicate any objection to his scheme by arguments based on his conception of the nature of God, as if he was really instructed in such particulars.

But, before the Christian is authorized to do this, he ought to have vindicated God's providence, and attributes, from the arguments of both atheist and deist, and not to have then asserted that God was inscrutable, for if God really be inscrutable, he is so in all things.

But here I may be told, that the Christian, though he acknowledges God to be inscrutable, has a certain knowledge of him from the Scripture, by which we do really comprehend more or less of his nature, his attributes, his purposes, and providence.

Now I deny positively that we have any such information, whatever, communicated to us in the Scriptures. Jehovah has, undoubt-

edly, made known to us the existence of certain facts or particulars, which we ought to receive as religious dogmas, but we have no intellectual light afforded us to comprehend these dogmas in their actual merits, even as single propositions, and infinitely less so as they are connected with ultimate purposes, and if we are ignorant of such essential points, Jehovah is as really and truly inscrutable in the Scripture, as he is in the natural world, when we offer that explanation to the atheist.

But however manifest this may be, there are few Christians who do not argue upon the hidden purposes of Jehovah with as little reverence and humility, as if they understood these subjects with all distinctness, and alone when their theories are crushed by overwhelming objections, do they then exclaim that Jehovah is inscrutable. This doctrine, however, they then only advance to silence their opponent, for they cherish their own presumptuous conceits as zealously as before, and consider them with all their preposterous anomalies to be actually true, though hidden in the inscrutability of Jehovah's purposes, and that in the end they shall be made manifest to all the world.

I therefore contend, in strict accordance with the Scripture, that Jehovah is as absolutely inscrutable to the Christian as he is to the deist, and that there is no possibility of estimating any, not even the smallest of his purposes. And to come at the root of the whole error on this subject, I contend that all Scripture is not revelation to us. That part is alone revealed to us, which is distinctly and clearly revealed, and that many things which men have inferred to be revealed to us in the Scripture writings, are altogether unjustifiable inferences. It must be evident that it is impossible a divine message can be communicated to us, that may not, in its simplest enunciation, be connected by ingenious suggestion, with the nature of Jehovah and his purposes in making such enunciation, and where such communications have been so often made as they are in the Scriptures, it is no very difficult matter to make a long train of inferential doctrines, that shall be capable of being wrought into systems, that may appear to have more or less verisimilitude, with what are undoubtedly clear doctrines of Scripture. Nevertheless, the anomalies that are apparent for the most part in every such system, and the great differences that exist between pious and intelligent men as to their truth, are sufficient to convince the unprejudiced Christian, that many of our theological doctrines, instead of being of Scripture authority, cannot be considered other than mere

inventions and teachings of men, and which in too many instances, have had an injurious influence on Christian society.

Many of the theological dogmas, entertained at the present time in our protestant churches, bewilder and perplex, if they do not also more or less lead astray well meaning individuals, who by the prejudices of education, under the influence of sectarian doctrines, do not exercise that simple faith before Jehovah, through which they might attain to a greater spiritual perfection.

Of the more important of such matters, are the extraordinary opinions maintained by many sects on the subject of Original Sin, Predestination, Election, &c. and the still more presumptuous doctrines taught concerning the nature of the Godhead, and of the person and functions of the Redeemer.

It needs no apology from me to enter upon the discussion of these subjects, for the importance with which they are invested in the theological teaching of the present time, is such, that unless we have correct views of them it is scarcely possible that we can exercise ourselves acceptably before Jehovah, according to the requirements of the Scripture.

It shall, therefore, begin a discourse upon these subjects, with an inquiry into the truth of the doctrine of Original Sin, which is the source from which a great number of false doctrines and erroneous practices seem to have proceeded.

It is a fundamental doctrine with the great majority of professing Christians, that in consequence of the transgression of our first parents in the garden of Eden, they became altogether corrupt and sinful in their nature, that by natural generation from such a source all their posterity are born with an inherent taint and proclivity to sin, so that we are by nature, not only averse to do good, but actually inclined to do evil. This radical corruption of our nature is by the theologians termed Original Sin.

As this doctrine concerning the moral constitution of human nature, seems to be in a remarkable degree, contrary to the scope and argument of the Scripture, which no where seems to imply any moral inability in mankind to do right if they choose, I propose to investigate the truth of this doctrine, with all the attention that it merits, as being almost universally recognized among professing Christians.

It would require too much space and time for us to notice the several modifications of this doctrine, according to its enunciation among particular Christian sects; I shall, therefore, make use of

the Confession of Faith, of the Presbyterian church, which, in an especial manner, has avowed itself the defender of the doctrine.

As the doctrine of Original Sin is based in the fall of our first parents, it is evidently necessary that we have a correct view of their condition before their transgression, that we may be able to appreciate their condition afterwards. I, therefore, shall preface the enunciation of the doctrine of Original Sin, with an extract from chap. iv. of the Confession of Faith concerning the paradisiacal state of our first parents.

“After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will which was subject unto change. Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God.”

Though I have an objection to the ambiguity of the phrase, “*having the law of God written in their hearts*,” yet I accept the explanation given of it in the Confession of Faith, that it is synonymous with that moral conscience of the heathens, which enables them to determine the propriety or impropriety of their actions to one another. Rom. ii. 14, 15. And with this explanation, I have no other objection to make against the proceeding exhibition of Adam and Eve’s paradisiacal state.

We now proceed to state the doctrine of Original Sin, and how it arose, from chap. vi. of the Confession of Faith.

“Our first parents being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to his wise and holy council, to permit, having purposed to order it according to his own glory.

“By this sin, they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.

“They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.

“From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.”

Though all Christian sects in the general, agree that mankind

are naturally in this desperate moral condition, and altogether unable to do right, yet I have never heard, nor read a sermon, which is necessarily addressed to persons of all sorts and conditions, which did not call on them to repent and be saved, and which did not by its whole argument, either assert or imply that if any one should ultimately fall under the judgments of Jehovah, that it was his own fault and inexcusable folly.

This being undeniably the case throughout all Christendom, or wherever the Gospel may be preached to the heathen, and if to this we add, that the Scripture itself calls on us universally to keep Jehovah's commandments, that it offers rewards if we will be obedient, and denounces punishments if we be disobedient, it does strike me to be the greatest of all inconsistencies, to be told that the doctrine of Original Sin is one of the fundamental principles of the Christian faith.

But notwithstanding this appearance of inconsistency between the doctrine and practice of the Christian world, it cannot but be that there is great argument, or semblance of argument, to have induced them to have adopted a doctrine, which it is the continual proceeding of the church to contradict in the most unequivocal manner.

On examining the Confession of Faith for the warranty upon which this doctrine has been constructed, I find many references to various parts of the Old and New Testament as authorities, but which, with all deference of opinion, I think to be wholly misapplied.

Of all the texts quoted by the Confession of Faith, the only ones that speak directly concerning Adam and Eve, are the following:

Genesis iii. 7, 9. "And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were *naked*, and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God, walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God, among the trees of the garden."

Other texts are from the commentaries of the apostolic writers, such as the following: "For since by man *came* death, by man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." —1 Cor. xv. 21, 22, 45, 49. Rom. v. 12, 15, &c.

All the other texts quoted, I do not think worth while to extract, I have no objection to admit them, they amount to this:

1. That Adam and Eve produced children like themselves.
2. That mankind are all mortal, being made subject to death in consequence of the punishment inflicted on Adam's transgression.
3. That all mankind are sinners before God, and that there are none perfect or righteous before him.

With this exposition of the Scripture texts, advanced as the authorities for the doctrine of Original Sin, I ask where is it taught either in the Old or New Testament, that Adam and Eve "became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body?" Where do the Scriptures teach, that we, the posterity of Adam and Eve, are born "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil?"

Where is it said in any part of the Scriptures, that the moral nature and constitution of Adam and Eve, was changed or depraved by their lapse in paradise? Where is it said that Jehovah ceased to hold communion with man after this transgression of our progenitors? Did he not announce a Redeemer to Adam and Eve, and to their future prosperity? did he not visibly accept the offering of Abel? did he not tell Cain that if he did well he should be accepted? did he not accuse Cain of his brother's death? translate Enoch? and instruct Noah of the approaching deluge of waters? Who then shall tell me that Jehovah did not hold gracious communion with mankind after the fall, as freely as before, or until the race of men gradually *corrupted their ways*, so as to grieve his spirit to depart from them through their own wickedness. But as long as a single person lived faithfully and righteously before him, God held communion with him, and assigned as his reason for the salvation he gave to Noah, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark, for *thee have I seen righteous before me* in this generation."—Gen. vii. 1. See also chap. vi. 5 to 22.

And, finally, on this subject, let me ask, in what moral or religious particular did the condition of Adam and Eve in Paradise differ from our condition at the present time? If Jehovah held visible communion with Adam and Eve, was not Satan also in paradise to tempt them? If there were means of grace by which they could be sustained in their obedience, so Satan was also at hand in paradise itself to tempt them to disobedience, and notwithstanding all their advantages, the adversary did prevail, and seduced them to transgress the commandment given to them. Now where is the difference between the condition of Adam and Eve, and that of ourselves at the present time. We are required to observe the commands of God, and a reward is offered to us, if we are faithful.

On the other hand, we are continually tempted to sin, and the punishment of spiritual death has been announced to us as the certain consequence of our disobedience.

If Adam and Eve fell without any taint of Original Sin, why should our transgressions be considered a proof of the existence of Original Sin in us. Adam and Eve's transgression was not less in its moral obliquity than any of our offences. If they, therefore, sinned without Original Sin, it never can be inferred that our transgressions proceed from that source.

As the Scriptures, in my apprehension, do not give any direct authority for the doctrine of Original Sin, I cannot easily explain how it first originated in the Christian church. It certainly never was a doctrine received among the Jews. But as I think we are authorized to make a conjecture on the subject, I venture to suggest, that it has arisen from the following circumstances. The theologians finding that mankind were universally sinful, whether by their own experience, or whether as clearly represented in the biblical writings, so in this undeniable fact they supposed there must be some radical principle of moral corruption in the constitution of human nature, to account why all should be more or less sinful before Jehovah, and none perfectly righteous. But as they were altogether in error upon the subject of the true nature of sin, they could not admit that Jehovah had made man and the world such as it is, for that would have been, according to their view, to make Jehovah the author of sin, and therefore they inferred that he indeed had made man in the perfection of his own image; that he indeed had made Adam and Eve perfect, absolutely perfect in their original moral constitution, and that all the wickedness, perverseness, and corruption of human nature, proceeded from an alteration of Adam's moral constitution after the fall; and this doctrine has been so long cherished by the religious part of society, that it seems to be almost impious in their eyes to dispute its truth.

But so far as the moral attributes of Jehovah are implicated with the constitution of human nature, the reference of our corrupt disposition to Adam's transgression, does not vindicate Jehovah from having made man just as he is. For unless we deny his prescience, which the whole Scripture asserts, and the fulfilment of prophecy establishes, Jehovah knew that Adam would fall, and the courses that Adam's posterity would take. I think, therefore, that we need have no hesitation to admit that Jehovah made the world just as it is, and that the wickedness of men under such a supposition, does

not impeach his attributes one whit more than the theory which ascribes all our sin and corruption to Adam's transgression.*

Now I apprehend that the whole source of embarrassment among men, and the sole difficulty that has given rise to the doctrine of Original Sin, lies in the absolute ignorance of the theologians concerning the nature of sin itself, or what it is that constitutes the sinfulness of human actions.

The great source of error on this subject, arises from the prevalence of the pestiferous theory of Realism,† which has established the notion there is such an essence as sin, that there is something in its nature that is absolutely hateful and offensive to Jehovah, and that, therefore, it brings down justly the judgments of a holy God upon the head of every transgressor.

I, therefore, once more, as a Nominalist, take the field against this ancient foe, and contend that there is no such thing, essence, or absolute principle, as sin; but that sin is simply *disobedience* to the law or commandment of Jehovah, and further, that the offence of sin does not consist in the *act itself*, but in the *intention or will of the agent*. Or, according to St. Paul, where there is *no law* there is *no transgression*.

As the Scriptures do not write upon sin but as a subject implicated with the moral actions of responsible agents, so it must be clear that the sinfulness of any act, can only be estimated by the law that regulates the moral proceedings of any class of intelligent beings, and as such is capable of an almost infinite variety of exhibition. See our discourse on Moral Distinctions, page 84, &c.

*Why Jehovah permitted Adam to fall, and why we, his descendants, are involved in the temporal consequences of his disobedience, I do not presume to conjecture. But are we in the consequences of Adam's transgression and temporal punishment, placed in a worse moral condition than if he had not fallen? I apprehend not, for I presume if he had stood, then his posterity would have nevertheless endured a trial before Jehovah in their own individual responsibilities just as we do at present, and with an equal liability to fall as Adam did. If our liability to stand or fall be *cæteris paribus* equal whether Adam stood or fell, what is the real difference in our moral condition under either state? I should conceive that at the consummation of all things, it will be a matter of no moment whatever to us, whether Adam had stood or not. Our brief existence being then merged in eternity, the sorrow, the toil, the death, to which we were made subject, will have ceased, and the important lesson thus taught us of the consequences of Adam's transgression, illustrating ulterior purposes of Jehovah, shall avail us profitably for ever.

†Any terms of disapprobation that a good man can use, may be applied to the theory of Realism, whether as estimated in their absolute essences and principles, or in their doctrine of abstract ideas. Their opinions have led men into atheism, on the one hand, and on the other, they have nearly rendered the simplicity of the gospel unintelligible. We may, therefore, truly say of their doctrine, "*inter muros peccatur et extra*," and as such is worthy of all aversion.

All our ideas concerning sin are, therefore, merely nominal or relative to that constitution of human nature, which our Creator has been pleased to exercise, under the requisition that we obey his commandments, with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength. Consequently, if we do not render this perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah, we are guilty of sin.

But the sin does not consist in the mere act itself, that is to say: there is no act in itself sinful, it is so, because we disregard the constitutions and appointments of God, regulating that act. That this is the case I think undeniable, for, I know not of a single act that may be performed by man, that is not under our present constitution, either right, or sinful, just as we conform to, or disregard, the appointments of our Maker, or if there be any particular matter, apparently hostile to this view, it can only be so, until the subject is fairly investigated, when it will be found to be strictly bound by all the peculiarities that constitute the rectitude or sinfulness of all other human actions, in the sight of Jehovah.

As it is impossible for us to conceive of sin, but as the breach of a law that regulates our peculiar nature, a brief view of the actual constitution of human nature will exhibit, without any obscurity, the true nature of sin, and that it is wholly nominal or relative, and in nothing absolute. In other words, no act is sinful in itself, the will or intention alone makes the act sinful, according as it disregards the law of God.

We are, in our intellectual and physical constitution, made subject to a variety of impulses, which may be all classed under two heads, those that pertain to the indulgence and gratification of the body, and those that pertain to the gratification and indulgence of our intellectual spirit. As we naturally desire to accomplish what is grateful, so we as naturally flee from, or avoid, what is painful or disagreeable. Our whole life is passed under the influence of things that either indirectly or directly influence the constitutional impulses of our being, and our moral responsibility is exercised before our Creator, by regulating the impulses of our constitution, according to his revealed law on those subjects.

To illustrate this general view, I shall state, that, as our nature is constituted to be sensible to hunger, thirst, and cold, so our most pressing impulse is to gratify the constitutional desires thus excited. If, then, by any honest exertion, we procure the means to gratify our hunger, thirst, and to obtain what shall make us warm and comfortable, we live honestly and acceptably, in the sight of God. But, if under the impulses as above stated, we steal from, or defraud any

one to gratify our necessities, we then are guilty of sin before Jehovah. Now, certainly, the impulse of hunger, thirst, or desire of being comfortable, have nothing sinful in their nature, nor is the actual gratification of the impulse in any wise sinful, if we do so honestly and temperately, but if we act dishonestly or intemperately, then we sin. Sin, therefore, is not in the act itself, it is in the means we use, or the will or intention in using them, that is sinful.

Again, we are constituted under the influence of sexual impulses, neither the impulse itself, nor the gratification of the impulse is sinful. If we marry, Jehovah has legitimated this intercourse, but if we seek our gratification in fornication, or adultery, it is sinful; because, Jehovah has forbidden them. Sexual intercourse, therefore, in the mere act, is neither right nor sinful, it alone becomes either, according as we govern ourselves by the command of God, or as we disregard his commandments.

The love of fame, the desire of eminence and distinction among our fellow-creatures, is neither sinful in the impulse, nor in the gratification; for, if we act with kindness, justice, humanity, or in any honorable mean to attain distinction, we are good Christians, and excellent citizens. But, if we attain to greatness or distinction, by a disregard of the rights or interests of mankind, much more if we violate and trample upon them, our conduct is sinful, precisely in degree with our disregard of divine law on such particulars.

I presume the above illustrations will enable the reader to understand distinctly, that the impulses of our nature to gratification, are neither moral nor immoral. In the second place, there is no desire or impulse, that cannot be gratified with the approbation of our Maker, at the same time, that the gratification is sinful, if sought in a manner forbidden by his law.

Nothing, therefore, I apprehend, can be clearer than that there is no such essence or absolute principle as SIN. It is sin, only because it is contrary to law: therefore, St. Paul tells us, (Rom. iv. 15. v. 13. vii. 7.) where there is no law there is no transgression: "*Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law,*" &c.

The sin of man, therefore, consists simply in his doing any thing that is forbidden by the law of Jehovah, or, in his leaving any thing undone that is required by that law. As intelligent beings, undergoing a probationary discipline before Jehovah, things are brought before us, and our desires are excited by them, that our free agency may be exercised, whether we will govern our lives by the law he has revealed, and the blessings he has promised, or whether we will disregard alike his favor or his indignation. And, when we do fail

in keeping his commandments, it is not that we are unable to avoid breaking them, but because we will not.*

Now take the catalogue of human transgressions: theft, murder, adultery, &c. A man has been tempted from time to time, in the course of his life, to offend in such particulars. From time to time he has resisted the temptation, and kept himself, by the co-operating influences of God's Spirit, innocent from crime; but at last he has yielded to the temptation, and committed sin, not ignorantly, or from inability to resist, for, he has successfully, and repeatedly so, resisted the temptation, but now he has yielded to the temptation, because he chose to prefer his own gratification.

That all men, without exception, are more or less sinful in their lives before Jehovah, arises not from any inherent taint or corruption, such as imagined by the theory of Original Sin, but from the fact that we are intellectual and moral beings *of an imperfect constitution, undergoing a probationary discipline before him as free agents*. As such, exercised on the perfect law of Jehovah, we sometimes do right, and sometimes we do wrong. How could it be otherwise? The very theory of our probation anticipates our disobedience, as well as our obedience. What else could be expected of free agents under trial? If any man could keep the law of Jehovah *perfectly*, he is a perfect being, and no longer in an imperfect condition. But on this point we shall discourse more particularly.

The theory of our moral responsibility before Jehovah is, that we shall observe and keep the commandments or ordinances he has appointed us, *to the very utmost degree* of our power and abilities. Such a scheme, therefore, could not require an obedience from us other than the very utmost exertion of our moral powers in every particular. For, to require a less degree of exertion than our utmost intellectual and moral abilities, would be to defeat the scheme that proposes to discipline mankind towards the attainment of the greatest moral and intellectual perfection that their faculties and powers are capable of reaching. Therefore the law of Jehovah requires from us, the service of our whole heart, our whole mind, and our whole strength, and to render a less perfect obedience than this, *is to sin*, much more so when we are guilty of any direct violation of his commandments.

But if we cannot, in any manner, whatever, *do more* than God re-

*Therefore St. Paul informed the Corinthians "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you *to be tempted above that ye are able*; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Corinth. x. 13.

quires of us under the head of mere obedience, and as we may, on the other hand, transgress in a variety of degrees by *doing less* than he requires, so no created being, much less one undergoing probation as a free agent, can exhibit, continuously, a perfect obedience in the sight of Jehovah. For if such a being shall exert himself to the very utmost degree of his intellectual and moral powers, and never fail, not even in the smallest degree of his obedience, nor for a moment of time, surely such a being is absolutely perfect. I am unable to conceive how any created being can be thus characterized.

I apprehend, therefore, the deduction to be conclusive that our inability to fulfil, in perfection of obedience, the absolute requirement of Jehovah, proceeds from no pravity or corruption derived from Adam, but from the limited nature of our faculties and powers as measured by the rule of an absolute perfection. In short, the same inability must characterize every class of created intelligences in the sight of Jehovah.*

Now can any one pretend to say that the doctrine thus advanced weakens the obligations of Jehovah's commandments upon the consciences of men? Yet I have no doubt that some defenders of the doctrine of Original Sin will make such a charge. To repel any such imputation, let me, therefore, reiterate our view on this subject. We say the law of God requires the whole amount of obedience that man can possibly render, and admits of no relaxation whatever in their obedience, according as their consciences, enlightened by the Scripture, are capable of discerning where the obligation lies. And this is the only service that can be rendered by an intelligent being, for if a man exerts his whole mind, and soul, and strength to keep the law of God, it is all that he can exert.

Our actual imperfection does not vitiate the value of our obedience if we are unconscious of being influenced by improper motives. God has required the whole heart, and mind, and strength of man, but man is an imperfect creature in every capacity and faculty. If this imperfect creature does give all his mind, and heart, and strength to the performance of his duty, he does exert all that he can exert, and as no one can expect a man to exert the strength of a horse or an elephant, so neither can he exert the moral or intellectual strength of a perfect creature. God has required all his soul and strength, such as he can exert it; and, as God can read our

* Hence it is said in the book of Job, God putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly. Job iv. 18.

He putteth no trust in his saints, yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. Job xv. 15.

thoughts, so no man can deceive him as to the measure of strength that he could exert.

When a man fails in exercising himself according to his measure of strength and knowledge, and against his own conscience, he commits sin, and it is only sin when he thus fails. The sin is only measurable by his knowledge of the law and the light of his conscience, and the least relaxation of his moral ability in observing the law becomes a sin, for the whole amount of his strength is required by his Creator.

But, though the law of Jehovah requires a more perfect obedience than any human being has been ever found capable of exercising during the continuance of his whole life, yet the moral attributes of Jehovah are unimpeachable in making such a requirement, for he has appointed a propitiation for our transgression and sin, which he extends freely to every one who has failed in rendering perfect obedience, provided they be truly and heartily repentant of their wilful neglect or disobedience, and will seek his forgiveness through Jesus Christ, with a sincere resolution that they will, to the utmost of their strength, keep from transgressing in like manner any more, and to enable them to do this with greater faithfulness, spiritual assistance is promised. And with these views every text of Scripture accords that speaks of sin, righteousness, regeneration, sanctification.

I presume I may here anticipate, from the Calvinists, an argument in favor of the doctrine of Original Sin, on the ground that the Scriptures most expressly assert, we cannot save ourselves, and that our salvation is alone of God's grace, irrespective of any exertion that we can make to its attainment. I admit the apostles do say so; but do the apostles contradict themselves by this doctrine? for throughout the whole New Testament they call on men to repent and save their souls, which evidently implies an ability to do so. May we not, therefore, say the Calvinists have greatly misunderstood the Scriptures? for it seems evident to me, that if any one examines the texts quoted by the Calvinists, as proving human inability, he will find that they are those made by the apostles when discoursing on *the mere scheme or theory of human salvation*, and not at all as concerns its practical operation. And their argument is very distinct and clear.

The apostles argue that man can render no service whatever that can be acceptable to Jehovah, unless he has been pleased to say that he will accept that particular service. And if Jehovah promises to accept and reward any particular acts of faith or obedience, offered by mankind, *it is an act of grace or favor from Jehovah*, in the

clearest point of view; for how can the blessing or favor of the Deity be extorted from him by any scheme of our devising.

But though *the scheme of our salvation* be of the grace of Jehovah, irrespective of any human device or contrivance, *the attainment of that salvation* is the act of our free agency, for Jehovah has put it into our power to accomplish it if we will. That is to say, Jehovah has constituted us, and the moral economy to which we belong, in such a manner, that he leaves it to ourselves to determine our condition for eternity. He has made us, by his sovereign power, free to pursue what course we may please,* at the same time setting before us the consequences of an obedience or disregard of his revealed will. To influence our determination, he promises ultimate happiness, to sustain us in our temptation and trial, he promises the assistance of his Spirit to all who will ask that help from him, and when we transgress and sin, he promises to forgive us if we will seek it through the atonement and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we then will make use of these means which he has formally revealed to our free agency, *we shall save our souls*. And if any one chooses to disregard this constitution which Jehovah has appointed, and neglect to use the means which he has announced, such a one brings judgment and condemnation on his own head by his own will and by the act of his own free agency.

Thus, any apparent ambiguity of the Scripture expression concerning the grace of God in accomplishing our salvation, and which the Calvinists have worked up into a system contrary to the argument and drift of the Scriptures, is reconciled both to the Scripture and to our sense and conscience, and no anomaly whatever exists to prevent our understanding the whole subject. But by the Calvinistic doctrine, one part of the Scripture seems to contradict the other in direct terms, for it teaches that men cannot repent, nor save their souls, at the same time, that the Scriptures, from the beginning to the end, are full of requirements to men to repent and deliver themselves from the judgment announced by Jehovah against human transgressions.

With this plain exhibition of the fallacy of the doctrine of Original Sin, I apprehend we are not required to discourse at large upon predestination, election, effectual calling, perseverance of the saints, and sundry other doctrines growing out of the theory of Original Sin. These all fall together by the exposition we have

* The reader may refer back to page 21, where we have also discussed this subject in connection with another principle.

made above, for they are not taught in the Scriptures, and are but doctrines of men made through unjustifiable inferences. The word election, indeed, does occur in the Scripture as applicable to Jehovah's providence with individuals or nations *in the present life*, but has no reference whatever to eternity, as has been often shown by the opponents of Calvinism, though the perusal of the Scripture itself is alone sufficient for any one that looks to its scope and bearing, and that is not perplexed by the doctrine of Original Sin.

Effectual calling and irresistible grace, are doctrines made by perverting *conditional* promises of Jehovah into absolute decrees. If any man will strenuously exert himself to obey the commands of Jehovah, he has promised to sustain and keep him, and this Jehovah will do, as long as the individual perseveres in discharging his duties faithfully before him. But if that man relaxes aught, Jehovah withdraws his assistance, and if he wilfully continues to neglect or disobey, Jehovah will abandon him either altogether or until the individual repents of his sin and folly, and seeks the mercy and favor of Jehovah as it has been revealed to him through the ministration of Jesus Christ.

Hence it has been said by inspired authority, that if any man draw back, Jehovah shall have no pleasure in him.

He alone that perseveres in his Christian obedience until the end of his days shall be saved. Nothing can be more forcible on this subject than Ezekiel xviii. 20, to the end.

The only possible source of embarrassment that can remain in the mind of any reasonable man on the subjects discussed in this chapter, I apprehend may be from a certain amount of phantoms conjured up by advancing the subject of Jehovah's prescience, which under the cover of a theory that may be indisputable, uses it to justify a perversion of the revelation he has made.

Thus it is said, that as Jehovah certainly foreknows all things belonging to his own scheme and purposes, so whatever comes to pass, must be conformable to his appointment or intention, for there can be nothing contingent to his scheme. Therefore, as some men shall be saved, and as others shall be damned, so it must have been thus predestinated or ordained by Jehovah, for all things must have been foreknown to him in the contemplation of his ultimate purposes.

Now I admit it to be true, that Jehovah does foreknow all things from the beginning to the end, and that he knew who would be saved, and who would be damned, from the creation of the world. But what has this final unhappy state of the wicked to do

with predestination as urged by the Calvinists? In what manner does it justify any one to state, that the peculiar doctrines of *their system* are taught in the Scriptures? Jehovah has appointed an end and consummation to the scheme of human existence, and at the day of judgment we arrive at that consummation. Then the righteous shall be blessed in heaven, and the wicked and impenitent shall be cast into hell.

To this consummation, therefore, we must come, whether the doctrines of Calvinism be true or false. But the Calvinist will reply, did not Jehovah foresee who should be saved and who should be condemned? I answer, assuredly he did. Again I am told, then Jehovah has made some men that shall be damned? I reply, so it seems, alas it is undeniable, but this does not justify the doctrines of the Calvinists, it does not disprove that the damned might have been saved if they would. This fearful consummation alone impeaches the goodness, mercy, and justice of him who has created a sentient being to be damned.

Now though I know not how to vindicate, in any manner, the justice and goodness of Jehovah from this seemingly unavoidable imputation; seeing that some shall be damned, yet I unhesitatingly assert, that the Scripture both implies and states, that this fatal judgment has been incurred through the perverseness of the unhappy individual himself. Whereas Calvinism throws a direct imputation upon Jehovah, as having ordained men expressly for damnation, and from which there was no escape possible by the unhappy creature.

Our inability to reconcile the final judgment of Jehovah upon the wicked, with those attributes of goodness, mercy, and justice, with which he is every where invested in the Scriptures, implies no peculiar objection either to our argument against Calvinism, or as might be suggested by the deists, against the theory of Christianity itself. We have shown, throughout our whole discourse, that the nature, the attributes, and purposes of God, are wholly incomprehensible to man, and I trust we have also sufficiently shown in a former page, that it is utterly impossible for us to conceive of any rule or principle whatever, whereby we can appreciate the rectitude of any of God's proceedings. If the reader has lost sight of that exhibition, we again refer him to pages 50 and 90.

But though we are utterly unable to comprehend Jehovah's proceeding with the impenitent and wicked, there is nothing to forbid our firm belief, that however unintelligible this matter may be to us at the present moment, that the time will come in its proper

place, when we shall be satisfactorily convinced that he is just in all his ways, and righteous in all his doings. At the present time, it is our duty to live acceptably before him, and to use every means in our power to avoid that condemnation, which he has denounced against those who despise his word.

In consequence of the seeming contradiction of eternal punishment to the excellent attributes of Jehovah as a being of infinite goodness, some persons have undertaken to justify the Deity from the imputation, that such a theory would attach to him in the sight of men, by teaching that future judgments are not eternal, but temporary, and that after enduring a certain amount of purifying suffering, all men, and even the devils themselves, shall be pardoned, and received into the favor of Jehovah.

But what authority have these presumptuous teachers to thus expound the council and purposes of Jehovah. Shall that be considered argument, which is limited to showing, that words which express eternity at one time, at other times are used in a temporary or restricted sense? and shall this justify such persons to consider themselves authorized to use those words in whatever sense they may see fit? Such a proceeding as this is absurd. All that any reasonable man can admit, is, that their doctrine may, perhaps, not be false; we could wish it were true, but that any such system is implied in the Scriptures is certainly false.

Instead of implicating our presumptuous doctrines with the scheme of the inscrutable God of the universe, let us alone confine ourselves to doing the things he has enjoined upon us. The Scriptures alone require us to obey and serve Jehovah, and not to fathom his councils. Something must be left to exercise our faith towards our Creator, while we are in this our probationary state, and it is our duty in all things to act humbly and reverently, and if we are called on to vindicate the ways of God to man, it is our duty to honestly confess our inability to do so. And is it any imputation to the scheme of Christianity, to acknowledge that we cannot comprehend the final purposes of our Creator? Surely the absurdity of such a supposition, is its sufficient reply. We who advocate the simple truth of Christianity, do not pretend to expound or justify the ways of our Creator in a single particular. What we desire to accomplish, is to furnish an amount of evidence sufficient to induce men to seek the salvation announced in the Scriptures, or to flee from the judgments it has revealed against those who despise its warnings.

I have already stated in a preceding page, that among the un-

warrantable doctrines maintained at the present day, are those that undertake to define the Godhead, and determine the conditions of this inscrutable existence.

The very great majority of all Christian sects, are unanimous in asserting, that the Godhead, though consisting of three persons, is nevertheless one God. This doctrine is called the doctrine of the Trinity.

Though I do not regard, in the slightest degree, the circumstance that this doctrine has been maintained from an early age, nor that a great majority of learned and pious men have professed their belief in its truth, yet I do feel myself restrained by a sense of devotional propriety, from going into that formal discussion of the subject, which the assertions of preceding writers seem to require. Yet, as I apprehend, there is much error involved in our doctrines on this subject, I will endeavor to express myself both reverently and distinctly, according to those views which, I consider, the Scripture clearly authorizes us to take.

Nothing can be clearer, nor more distinctly expressed in the Scripture, than that God, meaning thereby Jehovah, is one.—**THERE IS BUT ONE GOD.**—This is also the doctrine of the Trinitarians: there is but one God, though there are three persons in the Godhead.

But, do the Scriptures any where use the word Trinity? do the Scriptures any where say, there are three persons in the Godhead? No, not in a single text, for the oft-quoted passage of 1 John v. 7. has been, long since, shewn to be a corruption, and is admitted to be so by all the more eminent critics of the present day.

The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is one which men have inferred from the Scripture writings, and is not a doctrine of formal revelation.

Now, inferential doctrines cannot be matters of salvation, for if they are of inference, they are not of revelation, they depend upon the value that every particular man gives to his judicious or injudicious inference, and the world has been agitated for fifteen hundred years by the violent and unseemly conflicts of men upon this subject, without seeming to perceive they were engaged in a most presumptuous controversy, with which they had no concern.

Is it not amazing, to one that considers this subject reverently, that the nature of the Godhead, the most incomprehensible and inscrutable of all possible things, should be a matter of warm, and often intemperate, discussion, by the presumptuous race of mortal men? and that we are called on from time to time to worship Jehovah, under the exhibitions of polemic theologians, who have no other ground of authority for their doctrine, than inferences they make

from passages of the Scripture, which, so far from being clear in their import, are vehemently impugned by others holding opposite opinions.

I, therefore, shall go into no discussion of this subject, but shall alone urge, that the Scripture expressly states, that there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ. But, this the Trinitarians will say is their faith also,—well, then let it be so, in all its simplicity. Why add the Trinitarian theory to it? Will you say the Scripture teaches it by clear inferences? Then hold it as a doctrine of your inference, but do not make it an essential doctrine of the Christian faith, and do not presume formally to address, in public prayers, the personified Trinity, but let us pray to Jehovah, as he has revealed himself distinctly, and not pray to him, under an appellation, that may be an act of highly presumptuous will-worship, since he has not revealed himself to us as a triune God, but as the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom he, of his infinite mercy, sent into the world, from a state of pre-existing glory, that we might be saved from our sins.

Now, why shall the nature of the Godhead be made a matter of our doctrinal faith, more than the equally incomprehensible doctrines of the Monophysites, or of the Monothelites, which so long distracted the ancient Christian world? Why is it, that mankind, exhausted by the vain attempt to understand such subjects, have agreed to dismiss these last altogether, and have ceased to compel the human mind to take sides on subjects which the Scriptures have not determined? Why should the doctrine of the Trinity, be made of more importance than other incomprehensible subjects? Why not let it rest, as it was before the Council of Nice? Indeed, does not our own conscience, when not excited by the Trinitarian controversy, naturally take this very course? Thus, for instance, in the prayer book of the Episcopal churches, of the United States, and which, in this particular, does not differ from the practice of all other Protestant churches, I have found, that of the prayers and collects in that book, as employed in the public worship, *thirty-one* only adore the Trinity, in formal or implied terms, while *one hundred and twenty-eight** involve no hypothesis on the subject, being simply addressed to Jehovah, through the name, or instrumentality of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, are these latter prayers and collects less effectual at the mercy-seat of God, than those which invoke the Trinity? Who can

*As I did not consider it material to be critically correct with these numbers, I did not go over the computation a second time.

be so absurd as to suppose this? Are those prayers that are addressed to the Trinity equally efficacious? Who will dare affirm this? for, where have we a single passage of Scripture, which authorizes a formal address to the Trinity? Even allowing the doctrine may be true, it is so as abstracted from all of our devotional exercises; but, if it be not true, and fifteen hundred years of prejudice and church authority have not been able to establish that truth?—if it be not true, I ask, in what manner shall we account at the bar of God for our presumption on this subject?

As the Redeemer has been revealed to us in his mediatorial functions alone, so it is our duty to receive him in that capacity alone. If he acts as our mediator and intercessor with the Father, during the present dispensation of things, what concern of ours is it, what the relation of the Father and Son was, and shall be in eternity? Cannot men see their presumption in this matter? Jehovah has not required of us to fathom the incomprehensibility of the Godhead, but to perform duties that we do understand, and to seek our salvation through Jesus Christ, who, having made an atonement for our sins, now exists our mediator, until the consummation of human affairs shall take place.

But if the doctrine of the Trinitarians be presumptuous and contrary to the exhibition of the Scripture writings, what must we say of that of the Socinians or modern Unitarians? I am at a loss how to express myself on this subject; on the one hand they profess to found their belief upon the Scriptures, and largely quote it to prove their doctrine. On the other hand, as I understand the Scriptures, I have no hesitation in stating my opinion, that their expositions and doctrine, in its important features, are directly contrary to the whole scope and tenor of the Scripture writings. I have no right to impugn the honesty or sincerity of the Socinians, but I am perfectly at a loss how to reconcile their opinions with the Scriptures. Judging by the light of my own understanding and conscience, I do consider the doctrines of modern Unitarians to be entirely subversive of the Christian religion, so far as I can comprehend the subject, and this being the case, I will not hesitate to bear my testimony against such opinions. If the Scriptures do teach us, and I am clear on this point, that salvation from our sins is only to be attained through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and in virtue of that intercession that he makes continually with the Father for us, so I cannot consider the Unitarian doctrine other than an absolute departure from the theory of the Scriptures, and a formal rejection of that salvation which God has freely offered to us. To reject the mode that

God has appointed, leaves no alternative and no hope. What then shall the end of this be?

In the course of a very general reading upon the moral and religious speculations of men, I have been often disturbed by the extreme difference that sometimes existed between their views and my own; but with none have I been so much disposed to loose patience as with the Socinian writings. The excellent archbishop Tillotson, on one occasion, speaks of Socinus as "a great master of reason," and which I shall concede to be the fact from such commendation, for I have never seen his works, but I defy any other sect of Christians, except the Unitarians, to read the works of Priestly, of Belsham, Evanson, and other of their champions, without being amazed at their reasons, and shocked with their apparent presumption.

But, though I consider the Trinitarian doctrine to want Scriptural authority, and that of the Socinians to be altogether contradictory to the Scriptures, I cannot advocate the hypothesis of the Arians. I cannot but consider it presumptuous to determine so incomprehensible a subject according to any hypothesis.

Whatever may be the nature of the Godhead, and how it exists as characterized in eternity, we are alone concerned with the present dispensation of things, which, as measured by time, have a beginning and an end. In this dispensation the Father is represented to us in one light, the Son, in another, and in these conditions of being we are to regard them, until the consummation of the now incomprehensible purposes of Jehovah shall be fulfilled, (see 1 Cor. xv. 24 to 28.) When this dispensation shall have terminated, it may then be proper to regard the Godhead in a different light; at present it is our duty alone to regard them as they are *at present* exhibited to us. Now most assuredly we must at present regard our Redeemer in the light of our high priest, mediator, or intercessor before Jehovah, and it is wholly irrelevant to our religious obligations to determine what our Redeemer was before the present constitution of things, or what he shall be hereafter. It is our duty to exercise ourselves on this subject in its direct practical application, and to forbear adventuring on points with which we have no concern, and on which, the more we speculate the more presumptuous we become. On this subject, the less a man ventures the more rational he is. On this subject, at least, "*curiositas reum facit, non peritum.*"*

In the next place, I think it impossible for us to have any distinct

* Curiosity makes a man *criminal*, not wise.

notion whatever as to the manner in which our salvation has been accomplished by the Redeemer. The only light thrown upon the subject, exhibits it as having been attained through his sacrificial death, which is remarkably confirmed by the typical sacrifices of the old law. Yet I hold any one presumptuous that undertakes to restrict the scheme of our salvation to those particulars alone that are communicated in the Scripture writings. The propitiation for human sin by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is a matter that belongs alone to the impenetrable council of Jehovah. He has, both by the ministry of the Redeemer and of his apostles, informed us that the atonement has been made, that the propitiation has been accepted, and that Jesus Christ, vested with power to save, ever exists to bestow the salvation of Jehovah to all who will ask it of him.

This being the fact, why should we perplex ourselves to know how our salvation has been accomplished.

To my apprehension, this view of our Saviour's atonement is the very one recommended by St. Paul when he expressed himself in the following manner, Rom. x. 6 to 9.

But the righteousness (this word ought to be *justification*) which is of faith, speaketh on this wise, *Say not in thy heart who shall ascend unto heaven, that is to bring Christ down from above?*

Or, who shall descend into the deep, that is to bring up Christ again from the dead?

But what sayeth it? the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that is the word of faith which we preach.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

In other words, St. Paul observes, do not concern yourselves how Christ descended from heaven, nor how he again ascended to his glory; believe the fact that he did descend, and that he again ascended with power sufficient to save as many as shall call upon him.

Now cannot men be satisfied with believing the truths of those facts, that Jehovah has announced simply as facts, and abstain from systematizing them into doctrines supported by theological assumptions of abstract principles? Can we not consent to leave such matters as we do the doctrine concerning the resurrection of the body from the grave? This no one pretends to know how it is to be accomplished. The body has been burnt to ashes, and the ashes scattered by the winds, yet we have no doubt that this very body can be raised at the day of judgment, because Christ has said he will do so, and we believe him able to do what he has promised.

Now as no theologian has undertaken to make a doctrine of religious faith upon this subject, the fact stands clear and distinct to us, as a matter of faith, exercised upon a divine promise. Let us reduce all other speculations and religious doctrines to the same condition, and the world will be enlightened by getting rid of an accumulated mass of theological presumptions that have been, for centuries, piled up on the revealed word of Jehovah.

The commendatory exhortation of Moses to the Jews, (Deut. xxix. 29,) is remarkably in point on this subject of making doctrines out of the intimated purposes of Jehovah, and should never be forgotten. *"Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed, belong unto us, and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."*

Now what Jehovah has *revealed to us*, are those things that are positively and expressly revealed for the obedience of our faith, and it is altogether unjustifiable to consider that the various inferences, which may be deduced from expressions necessary to make the divine communications intelligible, shall also be regarded as revelations of Jehovah addressed to our faith. Every one acknowledges the absurdity of supposing Jehovah to be in a human form, though he speaks of his eyes, his ears, and his hands; and why should we hesitate to consider that he, in like manner, often addresses us in phrases of similar purport, in the communication of direct precept or prohibition, through the metaphor, or condescension to human intellect, may be less evident.

The manner in which I have examined the preceding doctrines of men concerning the Godhead, seems to require me not to close the subject without a few observations on the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Though the Trinitarians in all the creeds of their several sects, assert the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, the assertion is without scriptural warrant. The Scripture expressly says, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, a doctrine which the Greek church has ever maintained against the corruptions of the church of Rome, and which even in the days of their greatest absurdity, the Greeks have never abandoned.

In every passage of Scripture, the influences of the Spirit are represented to proceed from Jehovah, though Jesus Christ has been made the agent of communicating it to mankind, since his exaltation to heaven. I have already said what was necessary on this subject, in page 257, and to which the reader is referred, in case he may think it necessary to connect what is here said.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE AUTHORITY AND CONSTITUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

HOWEVER unwarrantable a doctrine may be, or however pernicious its influence may be, it will be almost useless for individuals to controvert its obligations upon the understanding and conscience of men, so long as such doctrines are maintained by the authority of the church.

This word "the Church," which embodies in itself a history of the most extraordinary principles and events that have ever controlled the human mind, exerts through the medium of ancient prejudices, so astonishing an influence at the present time, that little improvement can take place with mankind, until they have correct notions of those institutions, through which power has been exerted that has changed the Christian religion from its beautiful simplicity, into a system both complex and contrary to its express theory.

It is impossible from the prescribed limits of our Essay, to make any investigation into the ancient history of the primitive Christians, and their successive departures from the simplicity of the faith as revealed through the apostles of Jesus Christ. We must suppose the reader more or less acquainted with those subjects, that gradually established the bishops of Rome as lords over the consciences of the Christian world, and of those circumstances that induced the reformation, and led to the establishment of the various sects included under the denomination of Protestants. We have not the space necessary to make any exposition on these subjects; our business is to take up things as we find them at the present time, and to make those inquiries and those observations, that shall be of practical importance to us in this our day, and in this our time of probation before Jehovah.

However anomalous the constitution of the various ecclesiastical associations of Christendom may be, they are nevertheless in the sight of their respective adherents, all consecrated bodies, and in an especial manner, are termed **THE CHURCH**; by which term men

commonly understand not the whole body of believers in Jesus Christ, but their ecclesiastics alone, or at farthest, their ecclesiastics, and that portion of their lay population who conform implicitly to all that the ecclesiastics require of them.

I shall express no opinion as to how much, or how little scriptural warrant, the different Protestant theologians may be able to produce in favor of their several systems. With this subject I have no present concern; my object is to discover who, and what is the church, and whence that authority of the church is to be derived, by which so much both of good and evil has been accomplished in the world.

It is sufficiently well known to every reader of the New Testament, that neither our Saviour, nor any of his apostles, have given us the least scheme or draft of a constitution for a visible church. Not only have they forbore to make any formal rule on this subject, but even their mention of the religious assemblies of their disciples are so very vague and incidental, that the most opposite inferences have been made by men from the mere facts themselves.

That there was no corporation of ecclesiastics constituting the Church, technically speaking, in the days of the apostles, nor that they ever contemplated the existence of any such body, seems further evident from the repeated warnings of the individual apostles to Christian believers, concerning the false doctrine that they predicted would be preached among men, in after times.

Yet, in no one instance, do the apostles as a body, ever interfere with a claim of spiritual power, and in no one instance, do they ever refer believers to an appointed or technical church, to determine what might be heresy, and false doctrine, in future time. On the contrary, they entreat the people to judge of all such matters for themselves, and to take great heed lest they fall into any error.

When we consider the solicitude expressed by the apostles on such matters, and the cautions, so frequently repeated to the people, to examine these points for themselves, according to the Scriptures, it is preposterous to imagine, that there either was, or was ever intended to be, a church to determine any matter pertaining to the duties of the Christian profession. Otherwise, the apostles would most certainly have instructed believers to consult the Church, to hold fast the doctrines of the Church, and in all matters to be obedient to the Church.*

*This is remarkably evident from the fact, that Christ and his apostles did recommend their followers to settle their disputes among themselves, by re-

But instead of any thing like this, they speak as follows:

After my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also, of your own selves, shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.

Therefore watch, and remember, that for the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears. Acts xx. 28 to 32.

For there must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. 1 Corinth. xi. 19.

There shall be a falling away first, and then shall be revealed the man of sin and son of perdition, &c.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions (this word ought to be *doctrines*) which ye have been taught whether by word, or our epistle. 2 Thess. ii. 3 to 15.

This know also, that in the last days, perilous times shall come.

Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But continue in the things thou hast learned, &c., and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim. iii. 1 to 17.

“For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears;

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

Knowing, that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, &c., I will endeavor that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance, &c.

But, as there were false prophets also among the people, (the Jews of old time,) even so shall there be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in damnable heresies, &c. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, &c.

ferring it to the particular congregations with whom they worshipped; for this is the meaning of the passage in Math. xviii. 17, “*tell it to the church.*” See also 1 Corinth. vi. 1 to 5. This was the practice of the Jews at this time, in their synagogue associations. See Lightfoot on these passages.

Now when we see this reference commended for the determination of mere temporal matters, and never the least mention made of a tribunal for determining theological principles, it seems to me nothing can be clearer, than that neither Christ nor his apostles, ever contemplated the constitution of an ecclesiastical body, who under the name of the church were to decide upon subjects of either faith or practice.

Ye therefore beloved, seeing ye know these things beforehand, beware lest ye also being led away, with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 2 Peter i. 14, 15. ii. 1, 2. iii. 17, 18.

In all these, and many similar annunciations of religious danger to the Christian world, there is not a single reference to the church, but it is made the duty of individuals to look to themselves, as instructed either by the preaching or writings of the apostles.

We shall exhibit this subject in another point of view, Christ formally directed his disciples thus:

Be ye not called Rabbi, (i. e. Doctors of Divinity,) for one is your master, even Christ, and ye are all brethren.

And call no man your father, (i. e. theologically,) upon the earth, for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Matthew xxiii. 8, 9.

Who, then, is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase:

So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.

Therefore let no man glory in men. 1 Corinth. 5, 6, 7, 21, &c.

Beware lest *any man* spoil you through philosophy, and vain deceit, *after the traditions of men*, after rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Let *no man*, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath.

Let *no man*, beguile you unto a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, &c. Coloss. ii. 8, 16, 18. &c.

The preceding passages, without regarding a great many others, of similar import, are sufficient to show, that not only the New Testament does not recognize any technical church, or corporation of ecclesiastics, but the whole tenor of the argument throughout is, that the apostles had proclaimed or written enough, to make men wise to salvation, and that it was every man's duty, as an intellectual being under trial, to exercise himself on the scheme and principles there revealed, as being those on which he would be hereafter responsible to his Maker.

Now, as far as I can discern the scope of the Scriptures, and the theory of Christianity, it appears to me most clearly, that the doctrine of a church to expound the Scriptures with any authority, strikes at the very root and foundation of Christianity itself.

Jehovah has created man to undergo intellectual and moral probation *before himself*, and proportionably to such a scheme, he has commissioned prophets and apostles, to make known just so much, and no more of his purposes and covenant, as will harmonize with his inscrutable purposes. In accordance with this scheme of trial *before himself*, the Scriptures universally inculcate upon us, that all hearts, all thoughts, all actions, are continually *before Jehovah*, and that the day is coming, when we shall all be judged through our Lord Jesus Christ, concerning our individual faith and practice.

But, if the individual, instead of deriving his faith and practice from the Scriptures, derives them from a church, then it is clear as daylight, that he no longer exercises his faith towards Jehovah as set forth in the Scripture, but his faith is exercised in an obedience to the church, *not to Jehovah*, but to the church alone.

Seeing then that the Scripture no where recognizes a technical church, or corporation of ecclesiastics, as having authority to impose the particulars of Christian faith or practice upon the consciences of believers, and it being further evident that the very theory of such a body of ecclesiastics, would necessarily transfer the faith which we owe to Jehovah and his Christ, from them, to the decrees of a body of ecclesiastics, it certainly cannot require further argument from us to expose the absurdity of the doctrine of the church of Rome, and its entire contradiction to the whole scope and drift of the New Testament writings.

It is useless, therefore, to go into any confutation of those arguments, which persons have advanced in justification of such a doctrine as founded in the propriety that a church should be constituted to act with infallibility, in order to preserve men from error, and to show them the way to truth.* It is needless, I say, to examine the worth of such reasoning, after what has been just stated. Instead of wasting our time with such caustical arguments, we require the proof that Christ or his apostles have constituted such a Church, and if the proof from the Scriptures is not given, we will not take any interested or human argument on the subject. Now we have examined the Scripture, and we there not only find no such church, but we find every thing that implies a contrary supposition.

But in thus rejecting the doctrine of the church of Rome on this

*As for a certain remedy against heresy, it is certain God never intended there should be any, no more than he hath provided a certain remedy against sin and vice, which surely is every whit as contrary to the Christian religion, and therefore as fit to be provided against as heresy."—Tillotson, 62 Sermon.

subject in thus renouncing the theory of an infallible church, what doctrine do we substitute in its place? What is the meaning of the term Church of Christ, recognized in all our Protestant theological writings, and in which, and to which, our various Protestant sects refer themselves as being essentially component parts.

Though all the Protestant sects deny the doctrine of an infallible Church, they all, I believe, consider that Christ or his apostles did establish a Church by the ordination of a ministry, who, under divine appointment, were expressly consecrated to those acts and services, that now constitute the clerical function as exercised among us in our various sectarian associations. There are few Protestant clergyman, therefore, who do not claim, under this supposition, a divine commission, which can only be lawfully exercised by those who have been ordained to this function by the hands of those who have previously been ordained themselves. It is of essential importance that we understand this subject correctly.

Now in the writings of the apostles, as there is no passage whatever, directing the constitution of the visible Church, so neither is there any formal instruction given concerning the ordination of ministers for Christian congregations. Such things are indeed alluded to incidentally, but so exceedingly vague, that the same statements are quoted as authorities by those who have espoused the most conflicting theories on the subject.

To my apprehension, the unavoidable conclusion to be drawn from this entire omission on the part of the evangelists and apostles, is, that they did not regard the ordination of clergymen as one of importance, for if they had, they surely would not have left us in ignorance concerning the matter. The forms of the Jewish synagogue, in their day, was sufficient in their view to the spiritual edification of their followers, and that form they used. Thus complying simply with already established usages, and with which their disciples were familiar.*

* Lightfoot, a distinguished clergyman of the church of England, and profoundly instructed in Hebrew antiquities, has made some observations on the theory of the Christian Church, which I think it may be useful to extract.— See his sermon on Christ's communion with the Jews.

“That Christ, by himself and his apostles, platforming the model of churches under the gospel, did keep very close to the platform of synagogues, and synagogue-worship under the law. This might be showed by showing parallel practices in the apostolic churches to those that were in the synagogues. As a public minister, deacons, reading, preaching, praying, collections for the poor, and love feasts, or entertainments of strangers at the public charge, but I shall fix particularly upon the ‘public minister.’”

“All the titles that are given to ministers of the gospel, are the very same

But though the apostles made use of the forms of the Jewish synagogue, they have not recommended that their disciples should adhere to its institutions, much less have they established such a form, as a matter of obligation upon their followers. They appear to me, to have left the Christian world at full liberty to follow any system, whether for discipline, or ordination of its ministers, that they might think best suited to edification.

If the apostles of our Redeemer did actually consecrate the usages of the synagogue, or one nearly analogous to it, as the model for Christians in after times, they have, nevertheless, forbore to leave any written expression of their sentiment on the subject. I, therefore, for one, will not take it for granted that they did so.* If any one contends that their example on this subject is obligatory, though I cannot suppose this either, yet I am perfectly willing to use the forms of the synagogue, which, I think, admirably well suited to re-

that were given to the public minister in the synagogue. A gospel minister is called, *angelus ecclesiæ*; so was the minister of the synagogue called the 'angel' or messenger of the congregation. The ministers of the gospel are called '*episcopi*,' bishops, or overseers, so was the minister in every synagogue called 'the overseer of the congregation.' They are called 'rulers,' 'elders,' and 'those that are set over the people,' so were the ministers of the synagogue called in every title."—Lightfoot's Works, vi. 226.

*That there was no church constitution either appointed or sanctioned by the apostles, thirty years after our Saviour's crucifixion, I should suppose must be evident from Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, where in addressing them on sundry disorderly practices that prevailed among them, he never alludes to any rule or order of discipline sanctioned by the apostles, but simply argues on the ground of such things being in themselves incorrect or improper.

That there was no rule or system established by the apostles on the subject of ecclesiastical ordinations to the ministry, is, I think, abundantly evident from Paul's observations, concerning the impropriety of women preaching or praying publicly in the congregation. This subject is touched on in several of Paul's Epistles, 1 Corinth. xi. 5, 13; xiv. 34, 35. I would more especially direct the reader's attention to 1 Tim. ii. 4, which as it is more especially considered to treat of the ministers of the Christian Church, so it becomes important in the fact, that Paul's observation on the teaching of women, must satisfy any one that his observations on the teaching of men was a mere usage of expediency, without any sanction of the apostolic body. Mark his words: I suffer not, (allow not, or permit not, are equally legitimate,) a woman to teach, &c. This observation shows that women at that time, did teach in the congregation, and that Paul disapproved of the practice. But certainly if there had been any church constitution or rule for ministerial ordinations established at that time, such a practice would not have prevailed in the Church, and Paul would not have said, I suffer not, and argue alone on the impropriety of the thing, but he would have said, our regulations suffer not, the apostles have forbidden, or do forbid a woman to preach, &c. But never would he have said, I suffer not, if the impropriety violated an established rule expressly sanctioned by the apostolic body. But indeed the mere fact, that the impropriety did exist, shows that there was no rule on the subject of ecclesiastical ordination. And let not the reader forget that these Epistles of Paul were written between A. D. 60 and 69, or above thirty-five years after our Saviour's ascension to heaven.

ligious instruction, and that its adoption would be much more to edification than those forms which we now generally follow.

But hitherto, we have been unable to discern how a divine commission for the present Christian ministry is to be sustained; the New Testament writers certainly do not formally recognize it as such, and if inferences be made on the subject, they seem legitimately to lead us to the Jewish synagogue, which as it never had a divine appointment under the Jewish church, so it has never been formally appointed for our observance under the dispensation of Jesus Christ.

The commission given to the apostles, was to go and teach all men what they had learned from the Redeemer, and the apostles, in the exercise of their peculiar function, ordained, or appointed others to do the same duty. But as far as I can see, they only used the form of the Jewish synagogue in setting persons apart for such a service. They did not establish a corporation, who were vested with exclusive powers to ordain for the ministry, and if any one contends that they did, the *onus probandi* lays on him.

Under no circumstances, therefore, do I perceive where a divine commission for the Christian ministry is to be derived, and neither can I see what there is to forbid any mere layman to exercise, without any ordination, all the functions of a Christian clergyman, when he may be so requested to act by a body of religious persons, or when his sense of duty may require him to call on men to repent of their evil lives, and seek the salvation of Jehovah.

But, as the advocates for a primitive church, divinely constituted to ordain ecclesiastics to administer the sacraments, and to instruct, with more or less authority, mankind in the principles of the Christian religion, cannot establish this doctrine from the New Testament, so they have been compelled to look elsewhere for arguments. What the apostles have not determined, the theologians of later times have sought for, in the writings of those persons who lived in the earlier ages of Christianity, and who are termed the Fathers of the Church.

But with whatever reverence man may be disposed to regard the Fathers, I cannot conceive how they can be of any *authority* whatever, to us on the subject. With respect to the opinions of the Fathers upon doctrine, the Protestant churches all agree to consider them of no authority, and, therefore, I need say nothing upon that point. Why then should we concede them any weight in determining questions concerning discipline, the constitution of church officers, and such like matters? Shall I be told they are competent testimony as to matters of fact? I apprehend this may be granted

but I also contend the facts are not of the smallest importance, unless as matters of mere curious antiquarian investigation.

The Scripture prescribes no formal rule upon discipline, church constitution, nor church officers, and the inference is unavoidable, that the apostles thought such subjects of no importance, or that they were of that nature that their future disciples could, without any difficulty, settle them for themselves. The apostles adhered, in a general way, to the form and constitution of the Jewish synagogue, and so did the Fathers that immediately followed them. But if it became necessary to add to or diminish from those forms, it was done because they were unrestricted by any rule on the subject, and they, therefore, followed their own views of expediency which were very soon, indeed too often, suggested by the influences of pride and ambition.

Shall, then, the use of a church constitution or discipline that prevailed in those ancient times, *and which was then but a matter of expediency*, so far as we can perceive, become, in the mere circumstance that such a form was used by them, a rule obligatory upon us at the present day? I can but express wonder at the notions men entertain upon this subject.

Those who assert that Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, or any other form of church constitution, is of divine appointment, upon them lays the *onus probandi*. But the example of the primitive Christians, on the subject, cannot be admitted as evidence until they satisfy us that the example of the primitive Christians *is obligatory* upon us. Otherwise the liberty of expediency which we conceive they exercised upon this subject, and which, we contend, is also our privilege at the present time, is debarred us without reason or justice. Since the New Testament writers leave us free to follow what form we please, by what inference of common sense are we bound to follow the mere expedient, or even unjustifiable usages of the primitive Christians, and thus sacrifice our privileges to a senseless conformity with their example or custom.

So, far, therefore, from conceding any thing to the authority or to the example of the Fathers on this point, but which, in truth, is so very indecisive, that the controversy concerning the forms of the primitive church is no nearer its conclusion at present than it has ever been; I say so far from regarding any thing that the earlier Fathers have written on this subject, I do not hesitate to assert, that if the original records of the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, or Corinth, should be now recovered from the wreck of past time, which would determine the fact beyond all controversy, that this form, or that form of ecclesiastical constitution or discipline was followed originally, I would

exercise a dispassionate judgment on its merits, whether it was better suited to edification than the one I now follow, and if I thought it not so good, I would dismiss the record as deliberately as I would the constitution of any modern Church. As long as the Scripture is silent upon the subject, no man can be bound by the institutions or example of other men, but as they may be to edification, and upon this subject let every one judge for himself.

Is it not a most preposterous notion that proposes we should concede to the first two or three centuries of Christianity any authority on religious matters? They were ages, comparatively, of great ignorance, where Jewish prejudices were mingled with heathen philosophy, and each striving to be dominant. They were ages that were characterized by the commencement and procession of that mystery of ecclesiastical iniquity, that in a few centuries later attained its consummation in the mighty hierarchy of the Church of Rome.

I shall not produce evidences of the spiritual ignorance of the second or third centuries, it will answer a better purpose to show what was the condition of things during the life-time of the apostles themselves. Any reasonable man can estimate that if such things, as are quoted below, occurred under the immediate cognizance of the apostles, how much they must have increased after their decease.*

** Of the errors and heresies existing actually in the days of the Apostles.*

Now I beseech you mark them which cause divisions contrary to the doctrine. Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

Now I beseech you brethren that there be no divisions among you, The house of Chloe, &c. 1 Cor. i. 10, 11.

For ye are yet carnal, there is envying, and strife, and divisions. 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4.
I hear there be divisions among you, and there must be heresies, &c. 1 Cor. xi. 18, 19.

How say some among you there is no resurrection? 1 Cor. xv. 12.

We are not as many which corrupt the word of God, &c. 2 Cor. ii. 17.

St. Paul speaks of his contending with false apostles, &c. 2 Cor. xi. 12, 13.

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into another gospel. Gal. i. 6, 7.

Some indeed preach Christ of envy and strife. Philip. i. 15.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work. 2 Thess. ii. 7.

From which some have turned aside, &c. desiring to be teachers, &c. 1 Tim. i. 5, 6, 7.

Holding faith of which some have made shipwreck. 1 Tim. i. 19.

O Timothy avoid profane babblings, which, some professing, have erred. 1 Tim. vi. 20, 21.

This thou knowest, that all they in Asia have turned away from me. 2 Tim. i. 15.

Shun profane and vain babblings, Hymeneus and Philetus, who say the resurrection is passed. 2 Tim. ii. 16, 17, 18.

Demas hath forsaken me, &c. 2 Tim. iv. 10.

There are many unruly and vain talkers whose mouths must be stopped. Titus i. 10, 11, 14.

Even now, there are many *anti-christs*, &c. 1 John ii. 18, 19.

Shall we, then, permit any thing, whether of doctrine or practice, to stand on the authority of the men of these times, or still later than these, when their intellectual perceptions were so dull, that the clergy who, at one time forced the sacraments down the throats of sucking children; at another, made a secret mystery of the Lord's supper, which was instituted *to show forth* his death to the world?

Shall we allow that reasoning to be valid, which, laying hold of certain statements of doubtful or of indifferent particulars made in the New Testament, then undertakes to elucidate them by practices which prevailed three or four hundred years afterwards, and which, though merely expedient in their commencement, had been continually vitiated by the ambition of a growing ecclesiastical body, who, as the years elapsed from the time of the meek and humble Jesus of Nazareth, progressed in corruption until his self-styled vicar not only arrogated dominion over emperors and kings, but by his simple interdict would, at times, put a stop even to the religious worship of Jehovah himself?

If the mystery of iniquity worked among the Christians during the very times of the apostles, how much greater was its influence after they were removed from the earth? Judging by the universal testimony of history in every age, we are fully justified to believe that this mystery of iniquity worked especially through those particulars that concerned the dignity, the power, and the revenues of the ecclesiastical officers. The history of the Church in the first four or five centuries, shows us little else than a progressive increase of the power of the ecclesiastics. We there learn that what had been originally given them through benevolence, was at least extorted by force, what had been conceded them through respectful courtesy, was, in after times, accounted sacrilege if withheld; what had been originally sought from them as men better instructed than others, was ultimately communicated to the laity as the enactments of Christ himself, and everlasting damnation denounced against all those who did not implicitly regard their decrees.*

Believe not every spirit, *but try the spirit*, for many false prophets are gone out, &c. 1 John iv. 1, 3.

Many deceivers are entered into the world. 2 John vii.

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes receiveth us not. 3 John 9, 10.

It was needful to exhort you to contend for the faith, certain men have crept in unawares. Jude 3, 4, 10 to 14, 17, 18.

Church of Ephesus Rev. ii. 2, 5; Pergamus ii. 14; Thyatira ii. 20; Sardis iii. 1, 2, 3; Laodicea iii. 16, 17.

* Though Jehovah enacted no penalty, nor announced any judgment against those who did not pay their tithes to the Jewish priesthood, whom he had consecrated, the Christian ecclesiastics anathematised those who did not pay *them* who were not of divine institution, and who never had the smallest right to

We will not, then, submit the smallest matter to the authority of the Fathers nor to the traditions of the Church. The Scriptures, and them alone, do we regard as our authorities, and they being silent concerning the constitution of any primitive church, technically so called, I do not believe that there was any such ecclesiastical corporation, whether in the Papal, Episcopal, or Presbyterian hypothesis. The whole body of professing Christians constituted the Christian Church, as the whole body of Jews had constituted the Jewish church. As to the regulation of religious congregational exercises, men were free to follow what form they pleased, and I apprehend there can be no doubt that the first Christian congregations were little, if any thing, different from Jewish synagogues in all their usages.

That Christ commissioned his apostles and disciples to proclaim the gospel, and that he gave *them* a divine commission, is undeniable. But he appointed them no successors, neither have they done so for themselves, as far as the New Testament informs us. That they ordained, presumably upon the theory of the Jewish synagogue, other persons to preach the gospel in its brief simplicity, is undoubted, and as long as Christianity was uncorrupted, men were thus continually set apart for this purpose with prayer and imposition of hands, as practiced in the Jewish synagogue. That there was any corporate ecclesiastical authority vested in them by these acts, is the theory of those who corrupted Christianity and perverted its simple institutions.

That the ministers of the Christian religion have *a warranty* for their profession as teachers, is undeniable. That their function is the most honorable that can be exercised by man, and that it is their duty to communicate knowledge and instruction of those particulars that concern the salvation of mankind, is also undeniable. But I contest the fact that they have any corporate existence by divine appointment, and I deny that they have any authority, *as ecclesiastics*, to expound Scripture. As teachers, they have no other authority than what is to be conceded to their individual capacities, their learning, their prudence, their good sense; just the same as we concede authority to a professor of law, history, or philosophy.*

tithes. Nevertheless "it was decreed, at the Consilium Romanum, A. D. 375, that tithes and first fruits should be given by the faithful, and that they who refuse be stricken with the curse, (*anathemate feriantur.*")

*To prevent any misconception of this observation, I beg leave to remark, that in saying a clergyman is entitled to no more authority than a professor of law or medicine, I do not in the smallest degree doubt that a faithful pious clergyman is enlightened and assisted by the Spirit of Jehovah, in the discharge of his ministerial duties, whereby he becomes more and more beneficial to his fellow-creatures continually. But, though the pious and zealous clergyman

Nor do I think any thing can be clearer than this, for who is to determine the value of the conflicting opinions of the ecclesiastics of the Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian Churches. Certainly there is no other arbiter than the Scriptures: for to this arbiter all refer. The text then of Scripture, *as it is to be honestly construed*, is alone our guide, for no one will concede this judgment to any Church but their own. The first step then is to ascertain the true and correct text of the Scripture. How is this to be ascertained? Why, by human means alone, by collation of manuscripts, examination of versions, and ancient controversies, by philology and criticism.

Now upon this subject, what has any Church or body of ecclesiastics ever done? I believe I can say, without the least hazard, that they have never done one single thing. All the immense improvement on this subject, that has taken place within the past century, has been accomplished *by individuals*, lay, and clerical, who, instead of being honored in their work, by the great body of ecclesiastics, have been mistrusted and censured for their labors.

I defy the whole body of Christian ecclesiastics, Catholic and Protestant, together, to tell us, whether the differing readings of the Samaritan, the Hebrew, or the Septuagint, is the true reading. I challenge them to tell us, whether any disputed text is true Scripture or not, otherwise than as based upon the labors of individual commentators and critics, who claim no inspiration for their labors. Shall we, then, allow ecclesiastics, upon such a foundation as this, to step in, and tell us they have a commission to expound the sense of Scripture to us, when they cannot tell, whether it is Scripture or not? Surely, of all the absurdities of human nature, nothing can be greater than to concede the clergy any other authority than what belongs to them *individually*, as learned, judicious, and capable men. They, just in proportion to their natural talents, and the amount of their literary and spiritual application, become qualified like professors of

be thus assisted by the Spirit of God—he can never become of authority to us further than as he is able, like the professor of law or medicine, to convince our understanding by the weight of the argument or evidence that he produces. And the reason of this is evident, for the spiritual influences of Jehovah are not *restricted or limited to the clergy*, but they are bestowed upon all men, without distinction, who sincerely seek after the salvation of Jehovah. The influences of the Spirit of God are as certainly communicated to those seeking after the truth, as they are to those pious clergymen who endeavor to instruct others in the truth. But it is impossible for human nature to ascertain the amount of spiritual illumination imparted to men, whether as laymen or clergymen, and, therefore, it is impossible that one man can be of authority to another man on religious subjects. We must decide for ourselves, according to the evidence before us, and in this circumstance our probation as individuals consists. But I shall discourse presently at large on this subject.

any other subject of knowledge to communicate instruction to those who have neither ability nor opportunity, to investigate truth for themselves, without the assistance of competent teachers.

But, though it is every man's duty to think and act for himself in religious matters, it is not every man's business to set up as a teacher for others. With whatever willingness men may devote themselves to religious services, even the most honest and disinterested are very apt to over-estimate their capacities, and to undertake the performance of duties, for which they are not so well qualified, as they are for a lower station in the Christian Church.

As we have more than once observed that a clergyman has no more authority for his instructions, than a professor of law or medicine, so neither ought he to have less authority. As no one can rationally pretend to instruct others in law or medicine, without having been properly instructed himself on those subjects, so neither can any one, with the least rationality, undertake to instruct others on religious subjects, without he has been properly educated himself. He ought to possess that amount of piety, learning, and good sense, by which he can improve every opportunity to do good, and appreciate every subject of knowledge or science, which the restless mind of man is continually bringing to bear on the moral obligations of human nature.

Therefore, notwithstanding my aversion to the doctrine of a divinely constituted church, and of divinely constituted ministers, yet no one must imagine from my preceding discourse, that I entertain any hostility to the ecclesiastical function. It is expedient that a body of pious and capable men, shall be set apart to preach the gospel, to instruct the ignorant, and to awaken men from the entrancement of their worldly occupations, to a sense of their responsibilities before Jehovah. To accomplish this all important object, the ministers of religion ought not to be embarrassed by any secular employment, but should be supported by their congregations in a liberal competence.* To enable clergymen to act efficiently, they should be qualified as far as possible by all the advantages of a liberal education, and having been thus properly edu-

* The compensation and support of the Christian ministry must be left to the people. The State should not be permitted to bestow the least benevolence or revenue upon the clergy. The people will maintain their religious instructors in comfort, and they will honor them, if they be faithful in the discharge of their important functions. The Church united to the State, no doubt strengthens the State, but the Church itself is defiled by the association. The spirit of piety is then quenched in observances of political dictation or patronage, and the Church will sink at last into a mere department of the State, co-ordinate with the army and the navy.

cated, they should be licensed as teachers, by the approving judgment of wise and pious men, who have a practical knowledge concerning things so essential to the everlasting welfare of mankind. That this body of examiners should be clergymen, I apprehend is the plain dictate of common sense. Provided they claim no right *jure divino* in licensing men for the ministerial office, other matters stand well enough as they are at present. The good sense of mankind will lead them readily to adopt every improvement which succeeding times may be able to extend to this important subject.

The appointment, therefore, of a body of pious men as teachers and instructors to mankind, is thus distinctly recognized. But a question of infinite moment is implicated in the exercise of the function of these teachers. For what is it they are to teach? Is it that their expositions or doctrines shall be received by men as of authority? Certainly not; for such a theory of their office, would undeniably transfer the faith of mankind from Jehovah and his Christ, addressing us in the Scriptures, to the authority of the teacher, which is absurd, as it destroys the whole gospel system. It follows, therefore, that the teacher or instructor is to exercise himself in the most conscientious manner, in the instruction of men in every principle of truth, implicated in the direct revelations of God; on which subjects, it is impossible to lay down any rule or limitation as to the amount of knowledge the teacher is to communicate. But it is obligatory on him, to make his expositions simply on his own perceptions, and on his own responsibilities. He has no right to claim authority for them. It is his business to instruct and teach, it is the business of those who listen, to satisfy themselves as to the truth of what the instructor communicates. If he has stated what they perceive to be true, they are bound to adopt that truth, if he teaches any doctrine which the people cannot discern to be scriptural, they are not bound to adopt it.

It is utterly impossible to regard the ministers of the gospel in any other light than as above stated, for if we allow the very smallest authority to them, we are dependant upon the frailty of their human nature, which, however honest they may be, will unavoidably lead us into error. If we allow a single degree of authority to clerical teaching, where are we to stop? There can be no limitation assigned, and the doctrine must inevitably terminate in the establishment of an ecclesiastical corps, claiming infallibility to their decisions. Such a consummation as this, at last opens our eyes, and we distinctly perceive, that if the Church is to be regarded infallible in her expositions of doctrine, that then we no longer exercise

individual faith towards Jehovah, as he has revealed himself to our understanding, but we exercise our faith only to the infallible Church. The evident contradiction of such a system to the principles of the gospel, will be manifest at last, by the Scriptures being forbidden to the people at large, for if they are read, the authority of the Church will be despised.

It must be perceived from my preceding discourse, that in making an argument against the existence of any primitive Church, or of church officers authorized to declare what are the doctrines of the Scripture, I do not urge that argument only against the extravagant pretensions of the Romish Church. My position is equally taken against the Protestant Churches, who, though they all deny the existence of an infallible Church, or body of ecclesiastics, to determine on doctrinal points *de jure*, yet, nevertheless, concede to their respective clergy, a greater or less degree of authority, on the apparently plausible ground, that, as being devoted to the study of the Scriptures, their judgment on religious doctrines ought to have superior weight over the speculations of mere laymen, in determining controverted points.

And that the Protestant clergy do have authority among their congregations, in virtue of this supposition, is undeniable, for no observation is more common among the less instructed Protestants, than this, "that if their clergy do not have correct views on religious doctrines, who else can have that knowledge."

Now I shall not dispute the fact, that the clergy are just as likely to be correct in their views as any laymen may be, but at the same time they are just as likely to be wrong. This is not the point of importance, I contend that no man, lay or clerical, no corporation or individual, should be regarded as of authority in matters of religion.

The office of a clergyman is to point out truth, and exhort men to obey the requirements of the gospel, but he has no authority to determine what are the doctrines of the gospel, otherwise than as he has the Scripture clearly for his warranty, and if any man concedes authority to the annunciations of his pastor, without discerning their value for himself, in the expositions of the Scriptures, he is guilty of an offence before God, for our faith is not to be exercised towards the Church, or any man, or body of men, but to Jehovah himself through Jesus Christ.

But, suppose a man meets with some of those hard and difficult passages of the Scripture that are susceptible of different explanations, and which we may, without any want of charity, readily be-

lieve, some persons "have wrested to their own destruction." Does not this fact imply a necessity for a clergyman to direct the conscience of the honest, though bewildered individual? Not the least, for it is upon our proceeding with such subjects, that our trial before Jehovah in part depends. He that undertakes to determine positively, on many points involved in the theory of Christianity, is guilty of presumption, and those that adopt any doctrines, whatever, upon the authority of a Church, or learned man, cease to exercise faith towards Jehovah, and alone exercise it towards the Church, or the individual, whose exposition they recognize as being of authority.

Again, it may be asked, how can a man ignorant of Hebrew, Greek, oriental customs, ancient history, &c. understand difficult passages of the Scripture, and how is he to guard against error? If a man be uninstructed on these subjects, he has but one or two talents to account for, those that are instructed in them, have five talents committed to them, for which *they* are responsible; and, it is absurd to expect that a man with small advantages, can profit as much from the study of the Scriptures, as him that has superior advantages. Let the uneducated man read the Scriptures in our translation, compare them with other English translations, and take advantage of every opportunity to comprehend them better, let him pray to Jehovah, before whom he is undergoing trial, to enlighten him with his Holy Spirit. Has not Jehovah promised to answer such prayer, and is not his Spirit sufficient?

It must never be forgotten that belief in the doctrines of Christianity, is an exercise before Jehovah, and implies an intellectual confident belief, not a passive or negative belief, which amounts to nothing more than that the individual does not disbelieve. Therefore, if a man under any circumstance of intellectual advantage or disadvantage, has any doctrine preached to him, which he cannot discern to be sustained by clear Scripture authority, he should refuse to profess any belief in it. It is a sealed matter to him, whether it be true or false. He is not required to give an assent to it, though every Christian church may receive the doctrine as true, and of sufficient Scripture warrant. It may then be asked, ought not a man to yield to the authority of so many persons, more learned, more intellectual, and more pious than himself? By no means. It would be highly improper for him to treat the doctrinal views of others with disrespect, because, what so many persons profess to believe, may very possibly be true, and he may, most probably, be in error. Yet, how can he say, that, because so

many pious and learned persons believe this doctrine, that it must be true, and that, therefore, he will profess a belief in it? Is a belief of this kind an act of faith to Jehovah? Certainly it is not so in the least degree. It is neither more nor less than a conformity with the majority of men, out of distrust of one's own capacity or knowledge, or it is a matter of submission to the Doctors of the Church, but there is no particle of faith to Jehovah in it, as far as I can discern, any more than was the case of the submission of the Jews to the authority of their rabbis, and which brought the judgments of Jehovah on the nation.

The great defect of our Protestant sects, at the present day, consists in the reverence with which they regard those antiquated teachings of men, set forth in articles, creeds, or confessions of faith, by which the light and knowledge of every improving age is prevented from entering those ecclesiastical bounds, enclosed by our fathers some hundreds of years ago.

That it is absurd for us to attach any authority to opinions of men who lived in times which may be termed dark, as compared to the light we now enjoy, it is only necessary to estimate the constitution of those ecclesiastical assemblies, who first framed such expositions of Christian doctrine. This subject we can easily determine, by looking at those assemblies of clergymen, who, in our day, regulate the affairs of the various Protestant associations.

Though there are undoubtedly men of the highest order of intellect, of learning, and piety, that have devoted themselves to preaching the gospel, yet, most indubitably, the great majority of the clergy are men of moderate, and even ordinary intellect, small literary attainments, and not a whit more pious than a considerable portion of their lay members. This we by no means impute to them as any fault, or matter to be remedied, a good man can only be a good man, and a clergyman, in being a good man, cannot be required to be more pious than any other pious person.

When a synod or convocation of any of our Christian clergy of the present day meet, they stand collectively, as they did individually, a body by no means eminent for their intellectual capacities, or for the profundity of their learning, however sincerely pious and honest they may be. And, as the clergy of the present day, so were they in former times, except they now are less arrogant and dogmatic.

Now, shall any such body of men authoritatively determine what is the true doctrine of Scripture, or true signification of Scripture passages for others? Why, the very enunciation of such a matter is ridiculous. Father Simon, Houbigant, Kennicott, Wetstein,

Michælis, and other biblical critics, have done more towards communicating true Scripture doctrine to us, than all the councils, synods, and convocations, from that of Nice, down to the one held this very day, have done, put the whole value of their labors, Catholic and Protestant, altogether. For as all our knowledge of divine things is derivable from the Scripture alone, so the more distinctly that we discern the meaning and reasoning of the Scripture, so the more correct are the views we have of our obligations, whether towards God or man. And, if any passage of Scripture be obscure, if it cannot be solved by pious and learned philologists, there are no officers in the Christian church that can determine its true meaning, either by appointment of Jehovah, or in virtue of their ministerial office. Such passages must remain obscure, and we have no concern with them.

But what actually occurs at all stated assemblies of the clergy? The majority who decide on the controverted questions are undeniably men of ordinary capacities, and very moderate learning, and thus the judgments of the things of our religious faith, are absolutely determined by the votes of inferior men in every respect, who, however, seldom hesitate in undertaking to judge the merits of any subject, that may come before them.* And this is human nature; all men do the same, for until a man is instructed on any subject, he

* Without quoting the sentiments of Gregory Nazianzen, and others of former times, concerning the ancient councils, I shall make an exhibition of the manner in which a very celebrated Protestant assembly managed their affairs, by which the reader may see how narrowly matters of church discipline often escape being decided contrary to their present usages.

On the discussion of certain points of the discipline of the Presbyterian Church, in the Westminster assembly of divines, Lightfoot records, in his Journal, (May 16,) "Our debate grew long and hot, and there was much 'pro et contra,' upon it, and at last we had it very near the question, when Mr. Carter and others interposed. At last, with extreme tugging, we got it to the question, and was carried so narrowly, that it was thrice put before it could be determined; and there arose a great heat, and at last it was carried affirmatively *by four voices*."

"Then fell we upon the second reason, 'We find that a classical presbytery did ordain,' &c. And this, the dissenting party urged to go to the question, thinking this reason not to make a clear conclusion upon the proposition, 'a classical presbytery did ordain,' *ergo*, a single congregation may not. This scoff cost some heat and long debate, and the thing itself spent abundance of time, at last it was put to the question and voted affirmatively; *some five votes difference*."

"But on the 7th August the votes were closer than in the preceding instances, for on the subject of baptism, 'so many were unwilling to have dipping excluded, that the vote came to an equality *within one*; for the one side was twenty-four, the other twenty-five; and there grew a great heat upon it, and when we had done all, we concluded upon nothing in it, but the business was re-committed."

From the above extract, which is a fair sample of the proceedings of all religious assemblies on contested points, we may learn how credulous men are that can concede to the deliberations of ecclesiastics, any spiritual authority. To me nothing seems more justifiable than that bitter sarcasm of Luther's, *Religio nunquam magis periclitatur, quam inter reverendissimos*.

is unconscious of the amount of his ignorance, and, therefore, determines upon slight and unexamined grounds, that are often very far from being correct, though they may have the semblance of truth and sanctity.

I must not, however, conclude this part of my subject, without stating that there is an amount of good sense and true piety in the great body of Protestant clergymen, which has greatly operated, of late years, towards throwing down those ecclesiastical partitions which formerly divided the great body of Protestants into uncharitable sects. The observation of every day must satisfy us that the clergy are sensibly becoming more indifferent to many of their peculiar sectarian doctrines, which, a century ago, were regarded scarcely less than essential, and which, not to insist upon, would have then subjected any individual to the opprobrium of being schismatic, and unfit for their particular communion. Nevertheless, as long as many mere inferential, not to say unwarrantable doctrines, are insisted on, in the ordination of a clergyman, as matters to which he must profess a conscientious assent, so long they preserve an authority among the body, whether clerical or lay, that is injurious to the simplicity of the Christian faith, and which too often are stumbling blocks in the way of those who are honestly seeking the salvation of Jesus Christ, under the light and knowledge of the present age.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY TO AUTHORITY AND POWER OVER THE CONSCIENCES OF THE LAITY.

WHEN we look back to the Scriptures for the foundations upon which the ecclesiastical institutions of Christendom have been erected, when we have seen how slight an authority can be deduced from those writings to justify even the very loosest form of church assemblies, or of church officers, we cannot but marvel how it could be possible, from such insufficient and mere inferential passages of Scripture, to have ultimately produced that wonderful power of the Christian ecclesiastics, which has exerted such an astonishing influence upon the world, both in past and present time.

Though it cannot be expected, from the nature of our work, that we should go into any elaborate investigation of those causes that elevated the simple teachers of Christianity, into a divinely constituted corporation of ecclesiastics, yet the subject is of too much importance to be passed over altogether. Not only will some explanation be satisfactory to those who have never inquired into this matter, but it is of great importance in the fact, that the very same causes that exalted the Christian teachers originally, exerts, at this very time, an injurious influence upon the simplicity of that faith which the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ communicated to mankind alone as the essential principles of our salvation.

The fundamental doctrines of Christianity were very plainly exhibited in the New Testament writings, but the presumptuous curiosity of man has never been restrained to the ascertaining whether God had indeed established such a constitution of things. Like Nicodemus, as soon as they hear them announced, they exclaim, "how can such things be?" and the next step of their restless curiosity, is to reduce them into a system, whose rationale, *modus operandi*, and ultimate purpose, shall make their submission to the word of God accordant with principles of human wisdom or philosophy. This principle was the chief foundation for ecclesiastical domination, though other causes have also exerted a great influence.

But in order to understand this subject with distinctness, we must

advert to the intellectual condition of human society, when the earlier preachers of the gospel continually augmented the society of Christian believers, by conversions from Jews and Gentiles.

The Jewish religion at these times was grossly corrupt, not only in the doctrines taught by their different sects, but they also were considerably infected with the absurd and superstitious notions of the Syrians, Egyptians, and other adjacent people, concerning invisible powers, whether of good or evil intelligences, the study of magic, and various other particulars of heathen superstition and philosophy.

The Gentiles were all more or less influenced by the doctrines of their mythological schemes, and those boundless systems of philosophical extravagances, that speculated upon the nature of God, the principles of good and evil, the existence of the material universe, the human soul, and the end and object of all these abstruse subjects, as consummated in their future and eternal existence.

When persons holding these notions, whether Jews or heathens, were converted to the Christian faith, it was utterly impossible that they could divest themselves of all those trains of thought and subjects of speculation, that had previously exerted an influence over them; nay, they were continually engaged with unbelievers in discussing such matters, whether as confuting them, or as vindicating the doctrines of the Christian faith, which necessarily opposed the mythology, or the philosophy of all the nations around.

In a very little time, the notions and opinions of the Christians began to have a reflex operation on the doctrines of Christianity itself, and even in the days of the apostles, we find frequent allusions to false doctrines and heresies among the general body of Christians, which we have sufficient light to discern originated in the prejudices of those, who, though they had embraced Christianity, yet mingled in their profession no small leaven of Judaism, and of Gentile philosophy. This state of things lasted, generally speaking, during three or four centuries.

It will be thus perceived, that in the primitive ages of Christianity there was a body of people to be instructed in the doctrines of a religious faith that was involved with numerous controversies, suggested on all sides under the influences of Judaism and heathenism. In such a condition of things, nothing seems more reasonable than that persons set apart to instruct the people, and who were more or less qualified so to act, should acquire, in the first instance, deference and respect from their office,* and on the more abstruse or difficult

* It also was natural that those persons who had been appointed instructors

subjects, that the opinions of the teachers should have authority with those who are impatient of difficulties which they either will not or cannot take the trouble to understand by study and persevering application.

Thus the authority of the Christian teachers, was primarily the work of the people themselves, and, in the first instance, it is most credible to suppose, was rather conferred on the teachers, than sought or claimed by them. But, in process of time, when controversies became more subtle and more frequent in the Christian body as they did under the influence of the Docetæ or Gnostics, then the jealousies of the teachers became excited, under the greater opposition they encountered with contentious and subtle disputants, and then they and their partizans began to magnify their office, as teachers who had been appointed by apostles, and whom the Scriptures recognised as officers in the church. Here was a divine warranty, at least, and many might have contended that they were of divine commission.

Still the subject was too novel to countenance any formal submission of the laity to their teachers, but the impulse to such a doctrine had been given, and in the perpetual disputes and controversies of these times, the system grew continually, and without any one seeming to perceive its growth, from the simplicity of the causes producing it, which I will endeavor to exhibit briefly to the reader.

Of the Christian controversies of the first three centuries, the greater part were upon subjects incomprehensible to the human mind and for which the Scriptures contained no rule of determination. Though this ought to have put a stop to such controversies, the pride and impertinent curiosity of man was not to be checked, and since the Scriptures did not decide for them, the only resource was to call in other persons of similar views to sustain each other in their peculiar notions by the coalition of their respective favorers and partizans. In the first instance, the associations of persons holding different opinions, grooped them together in very ill defined systems, and which, though it disturbed, did not break the common bond of charity by which all who professed faith in Jesus Christ

or teachers by the apostles themselves, or, in a less degree, by those who had known and communicated with the apostles, should, in those circumstances, be regarded as of greater authority than other men. They, indeed, had within themselves a source of authority, for they could say, we have heard Paul or Peter express themselves on such and such subjects, or we have heard those who were familiar with the immediate disciples of Paul and Peter express themselves so and so. And however unjustifiable such references were, and however contrary to the writing of Paul himself, 1 Cor. i. 10 to 17. iii. 3 to 11, yet it is not always easy to disregard such authorities, when those quoting them were honest and of good life and reputation. The doctrine of tradition in the Church of Rome, originated in this principle.

were regarded as brethren, but the inevitable result was, that as soon as the comparative strength of the different parties was ascertained, that side which numbered the strongest, determined that their opinions were alone orthodox. Resistance and opposition, from the minority, then occasioned their exclusion from the communion of the majority. Sometimes they may have withdrawn of themselves, but amidst further disputes, and angry contentions, the majority assumed themselves to be the "Unity of the Church," not only as justifying their own orthodox proceedings, but equally gratifying as thus representing their adversaries, enemies to the common faith, and which obliged these last to vindicate themselves from charges whose peculiar force lay in the circumstance that the majority sustained such an imputation.

The more frequent and bitter that the controversies were, the closer became the union of a majority who claimed to be the Church in its unity, and whenever the dreadful term of heretic, or schismatic, had been once applied to those who differed from the majority, the foundations of ecclesiastical rule were established. The teachers of the majority, must now necessarily regulate the faith and practice of the people, and in the votes of a majority, whoever dissented or disapproved their proceedings, was excluded from their *UNITY*, as a schismatic, or heretic. Thus it became impossible to ever get rid of the theory of the *UNITY* of the church, for the majority always constituted the unity and the orthodoxy, and which words, as being the foundation and strength of their party, so they were oftenest in their mouths, and the most zealously insisted upon. Every determination thus made by the unity and orthodoxy of the church, constituted a precedent for future proceedings, and future regulations, until at last the whole Christian body, ecclesiastics, as well as laymen, were fast bound by an artificial system of their own creating, which, like all other corporations, soon showed that it had no feeling for those who opposed its claims.*

* A circumstance that tended greatly to *the consolidation* of the ecclesiastical power, arose from the misapplication of certain passages of the Scripture, (Math. xviii. 17; 1 Corinth. vi. 1 to 6,) which censure the practice of going to law before the heathen tribunals, and recommends that disputes between Christians should be settled by themselves in their particular congregations. This was indeed the practice of the Jewish synagogue, and as long as the simple institutions of the synagogue prevailed, no practice could be preferable. But when in the growing corruptions of the times, the ecclesiastical teachers possessed undue influence, and especially when they had arrogated to themselves the appellation of the Church, then this judicial power, seemingly conferred on the Church by our Saviour and the apostles, by an abuse of words, became the means of establishing a spiritual despotism over the Christian world. Of all judges that have ever existed, the ecclesiastics have always

As we have now given some idea of the general state of Christendom, in the earlier ages of its existence, we will now turn our attention to the ecclesiastics themselves, and from the scattered records of these early times, we can not only discern the distractions of the public mind on religious subjects, such as I have stated it, but we see the simple teachers of the gospel dispensation, gradually advancing in authority from their first position, towards the highest dignities that religious theory has ever conferred on human beings.

Clement, in his epistle to the Corinthians, written about A. D. 96, and who, by-the-bye, only recognizes two orders of church officers, viz. bishops and deacons, mention great controversies in the church, and a struggle between certain members of the church in opposition to their teachers. He, supporting the authority of these last, calls on those "who laid the foundation of the sedition to submit themselves unto their *elders*, and to be instructed unto repentance. Learn to be subject, laying aside all proud and arrogant boasting of your tongues. For it is better for you to be found in the sheepfold of Christ, little and approved, than to appear superior to others, and to be cast out of his fold."

Polycarp, in his epistle to the Philippians, written about A. D. 106, and who also recognizes two orders of church officers, also calls on the people to be "subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ." He entreats the presbyters to be compassionate, merciful to all, bringing back such as are in error, &c. He recommends them to be zealous of what is good, abstaining from all offence, and from false brethren, and from those who bear the name of Christ in hypocrisy, who deceive vain men," &c. These expressions, besides other passages, that might be quoted, show us there was a contention among them, and that he sustained the teachers of the congregation in the general position taken by them.

Ignatius especially shows us, that there was a great deal of schism and controversy in the Christian churches, during the latter part of his life, about A. D. 106. He very strongly takes part with the ecclesiastical teachers, whom we now find formerly enumerated as bishops, presbyters, and deacons. So decidedly does he support the teachers in these controversies, that his expressions are absolutely blasphemous. Thus in the epistle to the Magnesians, he exhorts them to do all things in a divine concord; your bishop presiding *in the place of God*, and your presbyters in place of the

shown the greatest disposition to be *good judges*, according to the law maxim, *est boni judicis ampliare jurisdictionem*.

council of the apostles; and your deacons, most dear to me, intrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ."

In his epistle to the Trallians, Ignatius says, "let all reverence the deacons *as Jesus Christ*, and the bishop *as the Father*, and the presbyters *as the council of God*, and the assemblies of the apostles." Similar blasphemies are to be found in all of the epistles of Ignatius, and therefore, we need not be surprized to hear him say, as he does to the Smyrnians, "it is good to have due regard *both to God and to the bishop*. He that honors the bishop, *shall be honored of God*, but he that doeth any thing without this knowledge, (i. e. of the bishop,) ministers unto the devil."

In his epistle to Polycarp, Ignatius calls on his people, thus, "Hearken ye all unto the bishop, that God also may hearken to you. My soul be security for those who submit to their bishop, presbyters, and deacons."

From the preceding authorities, we may perceive that in the various controversies, heresies, and schisms, that prevailed among the primitive Christians, their ecclesiastical teachers were continually growing in authority and reverence. Clement and Polycarp, like the New Testament writers, speak only of two orders of church officers, but Ignatius formally enumerates the bishop as distinct from the presbyters and deacons, and extols his office in the highest terms. But though his comparisons are actually blasphemous, still he does not quote any text of the New Testament as conferring a divine commission to them as ecclesiastics. If the doctrine had been established in his time, it is seemingly impossible he should have omitted to state its obligation.

One hundred and thirty years after Ignatius, we find in the writings of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, not only a claim for a divine commission to bishops, presbyters, and deacons, but we also perceive that the ecclesiastics had now taken their stand, as being constituted under those sanctions that belonged to the priesthood of the old Jewish church.

As it would be altogether conjectural to attempt to ascertain how this new theory originated in the Christian church, I shall forbear to speculate on the various particulars that might have possibly led to such a conclusion.* That the proceeding was very indirect,

*Though all the sects and writers that opposed the unity and orthodoxy of the church, in these early times, are exceedingly misrepresented, there can be little doubt but that many of them were honest good Christians, whose chief offence lay in opposing the corruptions of the times, and especially in resisting ecclesiastical usurpations. Whenever the reader finds any ancient heretics stigmatized for rejecting the Old Testament, he may take it almost for granted that they opposed the authority of the Christian ministry, as ar-

there can be no doubt, for the New Testament writers have never said one word, which would admit of comparing the Christian teachers to the Aaronical priesthood, and neither has the word priest been used in a single passage of the New Testament, in any connection with the office of teacher, under the gospel dispensation.

But, whatever may have been the means, the fact itself is certain, the word *presbyter* gave place to the word *priest*, which has continued in use from that time to the present, so that priest and priesthood, are terms now formally consecrated in certain Christian churches, as distinguishing their ecclesiastical body. Much as the primitive church is extolled, and a conformity to its apostolical institutions insisted upon, yet the ministers of religion, in certain churches, are not ordained by their New Testament appellation of *presbyters*, but are consecrated as *priests*, a word which the New Testament never applied to them, and with which their functions have not the least analogy.

Scarcely are there any subjects of comparison less similar than the priest under the Mosaic institutions, and the *presbyter* of the gospel. If the reader will turn back to page 197, where we have exhibited the actual position of the Jewish priesthood, under the institutions of Moses, it will be seen that their function was to offer sacrifices, burn incense, and perform certain duties pertaining to the immediate temple. Our Christian ministry have no sacrifices to make, and no incense to burn. The Jewish priests were never instructors and teachers of the people. Our Christian ministry have alone this duty to perform, for there is not another function committed to their hands by the New Testament. Of those that they have arrogated to themselves as their exclusive right, such as ordination of ministers, baptism of converts, and the administration of the Lord's supper, these were not either in themselves, or in analogous institutions, acts of the Jewish priesthood, but of the synagogue ministers. The Jewish priest was born a priest. The *presbyters* or *bishops*, and the *deacons*, were officers of the synagogue, and with whose ordination the priesthood had no concern. Circumcision, whether of Jewish males, or of a heathen convert, if analogous to baptism, was performed by persons delegated by the synagogues, and was not performed either by a priest, or under their permission. The paschal supper, upon which our ceremony of the

rogating to themselves the priestly office under the sanctions of the Jewish appointments. These heretics did not reject the Old Testament, but they denied that the institutions of the Old Testament were then of obligation, and as this doctrine laid the axe to the root of the priestly foundation of the Christian ministry, the orthodoxy and the unity of the church voted them heretics, and enlarged the libel by the most unwarrantable charges. The History of the Waldenses abounds in such facts.

Lord's supper was immediately founded, and which commemorated what the paschal supper anticipated, was a rite performed by the people at large, and with which the priesthood had no concern whatever.*

But, however great the dissimilarity may be that exists between the functions of the Jewish priesthood, and the Christian ministry, the dulness, or the religious pride of the earlier Christians, seems to have been gratified with the forced comparison, and hence the sanctions, the consecration, and the revenues, that Jehovah appointed the Jewish priesthood, were gradually and diligently systematized into sanctions, consecrations, and revenues, pertaining to the clergy of the Christian church. Under the habitual use of these misapplications of Scripture, the Christian ministry were at last regarded as a body actually consecrated by the word of God, and as possessing powers by which they of right directed the faith and practice of the Christian world.

The last steps to ecclesiastical aggrandizement, arose from the exclusion of the laity from all deliberation in church matters about the time of Constantine the Great, from that period, the clergy, unrestrained by any counterbalancing influence, ordered all things to the exaltation of their own order.

We have no concern with the history of the Christian churches after this time, it is sufficient for us briefly to remark, that the establishment of ecclesiastical power, over the conscience of the laity, brought no peace or rest to the world on the subject of religion. Heresies, from time to time broke out among the clergy themselves, which, from the greater pride and presumption of the ecclesiastics, threatened almost the destruction of Christianity itself.

To settle disputes among them, councils of bishops now became necessary, and the unity, and the orthodoxy of the church, being as heretofore determined by the votes of the majority, they brought continually all church matters into a more precise and determinate establishment, whose inevitable tendency must be ultimately to make some one bishop or other, paramount to the rest. After a greater or less contest for the supremacy with the greater prelates of the

*Archbishop Magee, in his valuable work on the Atonement, has in a brief manner attempted to show that the Passover was a sacrifice, and that the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the altar by a priest. But the archbishop is certainly in error as to the agency of the priesthood in the celebration of the Passover, and has given credit to the rabbinical statements, which I shall show are as monstrously incredible, as any other particular related by them in the Talmud. As this subject is of some importance, I have endeavored to show that fact in our first Appendix.

empire, the bishop of Rome at last obtained this high position, and assuming to himself the title of Vicar of the Son of God, he ruled, either directly or indirectly, over the consciences of all Christendom.

Whatever may have been the ambition, hypocrisy, or craft, exercised by individuals, during this gradual corruption of Christianity, yet, there can be no doubt, the great majority of men labored together with all simplicity and integrity to establish this state of things, which they honestly considered to be to the glory of God and the good of mankind.*

The portentous system thus established by the earlier Christians, was accomplished under the influence of principles which we can readily estimate. The primitive Christians, forsaking the simplicity of the gospel, insensibly, and gradually, introduced mere human decrees and precepts into their obligations, which insensibly and gradually transferred the faith and obedience of the Christian world from the revelations of the Scripture, to the body of their theological teachers. These decided for the people every thing they should believe, and every thing they should not believe, and thus, as the people ceased to exercise themselves before Jehovah, according to his revealed will, he forsook them, and they fell, like the Jews before them, into judicial blindness, which, acting and reacting on their ecclesiastical constitutions, at last induced an entire departure from the word of God, and the establishment both of doctrines and practices, which were diametrically opposite to his revealed will.

The practice of deciding by a plurality of votes, whether in congregations or in councils of ecclesiastics, necessarily brought false doctrines and superstitious practices into the Church, and then consecrated them with authority. Neither the congregation or the Church had any right to determine on religious subjects, it was the duty of individuals alone, and when the congregation or the Church usurped this authority, as they had no warrant from the Scriptures, so they had no influence of Jehovah to enlighten them, and they continually fell into error and delusion. Thus, for instance, instead of confining themselves to censuring Arius, for promulgating a presumptuous doctrine, they undertook to establish the

*Notwithstanding the enormous abuse and corruptions of the Romish church, I have not the smallest doubt that the great majority of their clergy have always acted with the most honest intentions. That they were under a most gross delusion, and that their proceedings, in many instances, were directly contrary to the Scripture, I at once acknowledge, but that there was any wilful violation of the Scripture, or that they were not conscientious in their acts, I unhesitatingly deny; and he must have a very limited acquaintance with human nature, that can fall into the error of misjudging them on this subject.

true doctrine on the subject, and by this act they became just as heretical as he had been, for the doctrine is incapable of a human resolution, and ought to have been so stated.

After the Christian world had endured the domination of the church of Rome for nearly a thousand years, and had submitted to the decrees of their ecclesiastical masters as if from Jehovah himself, the arrogance of the church became insupportable, their powers were so grossly abused, and the doctrines they taught became so flagrantly contrary to what the Scriptures had enjoined; that the human mind could no longer endure this abject condition under the cruel or degrading punishments to which every one was exposed, who presumed to differ in speculation or in practice from the standards authorized by the uncompromising church.

Gradually, the resistance to the church of Rome became formidable by the number of her assailants, and finally, the Reformation commenced, which under the preaching of Luther and his associates, soon maintained itself against all the force that Rome advanced to crush its rising energy. The publication of the Scripture in the vernacular languages of Europe, consummated the triumph of the Reformers, and many parts of Christendom awoke as if from the stupor of narcotic influence, and threw off the allegiance they had previously conceded to the self styled Catholic Church.

But though the champions of the Reformation effected as much as it was possible for men to have done at the time, they, nevertheless, came out of the Romish church, more or less bewildered with her enchantments, which required time and patience for them to understand and to get rid of. Unfortunately, however, they were not aware of their blindness and ignorance, and in consequence of which the brilliant prospects of the Reformation were soon obscured with a cloud, whose evil influence has overshadowed Christendom from the end of the sixteenth century.

Though the first Protestant reformers clearly taught that the obligations of Christianity were alone to be derived from the revelations of the Scripture, and that the consciences of men owed no allegiance on religious subjects, to any body of human beings whatever, yet they unfortunately did not perceive that what is to be termed revealed in the Scripture, must be clearly and distinctly revealed, and that inferences from Scripture passages are not revelations. Unfortunately, this distinction, which is however a legitimate principle of the reformation, was not discerned, and the Protestant theologians too soon began to speculate and dispute on sub-

jects with which they had no concern, and which in numerous instances were altogether incomprehensible. The spirit of sect drew the advocates of similar notions together, and who soon constituted themselves into churches, with a complete system of doctrines and discipline, intolerant of the least shade of dissent, and to which the members were bound by oaths of submission, administered in the most solemn manner. Protestant churches were thus placed under the supervision of theological teachers, who, like all other teachers, esteem a difference of opinion with themselves to be insulting in the first instance, and if persevered in, to be *schism*, which word now became a term of reproach with Protestants, as *heresy* had been with the Catholics.

The purification of Christianity thus was suddenly checked among the Protestant churches, and nothing has preserved them from falling into greater corruption, but the important principle of putting the Scriptures into the hands of the laity, and recognizing it to be alone the rule of Christian faith. The Scriptures have thus kept light and truth in the world, and though the beneficial examination of Scripture truth has been greatly impeded by the presumptuous notions and doctrines, which our Protestant churches have determined on many subjects of Christian faith, yet individuals in considerable numbers, have more or less disengaged themselves from the thralls of ecclesiastical institutions, and have by isolated efforts, sustained the truth, and disencumbered it from many presumptuous doctrines, maintained by those ecclesiastics who founded our Protestant churches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Whatever improvement has taken place in Christendom on religious subjects since that time, has been from individual exertions, and the increasing amount of knowledge among the people at large. The churches considered as ecclesiastical corporations, have not only done nothing, but they have opposed improvement. They have, indeed, in some instances, been dragged onwards by the necessities of the times, but generally speaking, they detest improvement. They look backward on their ancient state, when their forms and creeds were regarded with greater reverence, when the term schismatic was sufficiently terrifying to induce men to conform rigidly to whatever their articles or confessions had set forth as the true principles of Christian faith; and when to doubt concerning their truth, was almost as great an offence as to doubt of the inspiration of the Scriptures themselves.

I cannot take the space to show how mischievous the influence of creeds and articles of faith have been in the Protestant churches. If theology had been left free to the understanding and conscience of pious and learned men, to develope truth as they gradually acquired more light, though they might, from time to time, have fallen into mistakes, yet a succeeding generation would have been able to see their error, and to correct its improper influence. Whereas by enacting articles and creeds, under the obligation of oaths, errors and mistakes have been rivetted on the human mind, under the conceit of a divine sanction.

If theology had been left free from these pernicious restraints, would it have less tended towards its perfection than the faculties of medicine, law, or any other branch of human knowledge? Certainly not. There is no more inducement for men to go wrong on theology, than on any other subject, and if a man be honest, he has a guidance which attends no other employment of the human understanding. The spiritual influences of Jehovah are promised to all who will ask that assistance of him, and who will presume to say that he is not faithful in his promise?

But, however wonderful the rise and progress of the ecclesiastics has been, and however disproportionate their authority is, and has been, as estimated by the simple text of the Scripture, yet there is no difficulty in perceiving the means by which these mighty effects have been produced. The world, in general, do not perceive and understand them, because they look for causes proportionate to the magnitude of the result, as manifested in the consummation of the system itself. But as no proportionate cause can be discerned, the mind falls back on itself harrassed with the seeming profitless investigation, and bewildered by its inability to comprehend a subject so extremely interesting in the intellectual history of mankind.

The means by which ecclesiastical authority has been and yet is sustained, greatly depends, among other causes, upon the fact that the people entirely misapprehend their condition as undergoing probation before Jehovah. Instead of discerning that God requires the simple exercise of our individual understanding and conscience, in its own ability to discern truth, as revealed in the Scriptures, men consider themselves to be undergoing probation upon a system based in the absolute principles of God's incomprehensible purposes and attributes, and concerning which if a man does not hold the true doctrine on such subjects, he is actually guilty of sin.

In consequence of this utter misapprehension of the theory of Christianity, the great aim of Christians has not been to exercise

themselves as free and independent individuals, responsible alone in their individual consciences before their Creator, but they have labored to be orthodox in their doctrines and opinions, which necessarily transfers a man from the simplicity of the Scripture communications to the intricacies of human systems that attempt to exhibit this desirable amount of orthodoxy. In the first ages of Christianity this notion invested the opinions of the simple teachers of the gospel with authority, as compared with those who were not teachers. The same theory, which has been in operation ever since, has continually magnified the ecclesiastical teachers in opposition to those who entertained differing or hostile opinions with the orthodox, that is to say, the majority. No one must fall into the notion of considering that the Church has ever had any continuance of calm or tranquillity. There has never been a time in which the mind and consciences of men have been at rest. There never has been a time that some discussion or controversy was not agitating, more or less, the tranquillity of the Christian church, nor will it ever cease, until the consummation of all things. It is in this perpetual agitation that our probation consists, and in which we, as free agents, are so to exercise ourselves, that we may be found blameless in the day of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we again reiterate, let no man, on the peril of his soul, concede authority in religion to any other man, or corporation of men. Whether they be clergymen or laymen, it is the same thing. Every one must determine truth and religion for himself, by his own conscientious perceptions. We must determine for ourselves, for we shall be judged in ourselves.

APPENDIX, No. 1.

Lord Bolingbroke, on the Goodness of God.

[Note to page 49.]

"THOUGH I think that the moral attributes of the Supreme Being, are absorbed, as I expressed myself before in his wisdom, that we should consider them only as different modifications of this physical attribute, whatever ideas we may frame on the phenomena, and that we must always talk precariously and impertinently, when we presume to apply our ideas of them to the appearances of things; yet, *I think it proper to show the divine and the atheist, that even the goodness of God, is not hard to defend against them both*, by every one who denies, as every one may most reasonably, the question they beg and grant in consequence of their alliance to one another.

"The wisdom, is not so often discernable by us as the power of God, nor the goodness, as the wisdom. But a multitude of the phenomena being conformable to our ideas of goodness, we may reason about it as we did just now about the divine wisdom. If our adversaries show that men are exposed to many physical and moral evils, we can show much more good of both kinds, that God has bestowed on us, or put it into our power to procure to ourselves. The evils we complain of, are constant or occasional effects of the constitution of a world, that was not made for our sakes. But the means to soften some, to prevent others, and to palliate, and even to cure those that cannot be prevented, are so many instances of the positive goodness of God, which ought to be brought to account, and set against the evils with greater gratitude, and more fairly than they are, by men who pass them slightly over, whilst they descend into every particular of the sort, aggravate the least, and declaim pathetically and partially on all.

"It would be easy to confirm and illustrate what is advanced in the physical part, by numerous and unanswerable proofs, which are to be found in the writings of natural philosophers. These men have done more service to true theism, than all the metaphysical reasoners *a priori*; or to say something stronger and equally true, they have done it more service, than divines and atheists in confederacy have done it hurt. It is impossible to read with attention, and without prejudice, what the former have writ, and not be convinced by fact, and by reason grounded on fact, not on hypothesis; *first*, that we ought to consider the world we inhabit no otherwise than as a little wheel in our solar system, nor our solar system any otherwise, than as a little, but larger wheel, in the immense machine of the universe, and both the one and the other necessary perhaps to the motion of the whole, and to the pre-ordained revolutions in it; nor without being convinced, *secondly*, that the wisdom, or if you had rather say

so, the goodness of God, has provided amply for the well being of man in this world, and of the whole animal kind, who are objects of the divine care, as well as he, according to their various destinations. In fine, and to take away every atheistical subterfuge, whether we say that the several species of animals were the final causes of these things, which seem particularly adapted to the use of each, or whether we say, that the world was made such as it is without any regard to them; the proofs of divine wisdom and goodness will be equally strong; for, if the world was made for the universe only, and without any regard to its future inhabitants, this wisdom and goodness were exercised as much in fitting these inhabitants to live commodiously in a world already made, as they could have been in making a world on purpose for them.

"But we are not to think in this manner of the divine proceedings, nor to imagine that in them one plan succeeded another. Both were alike present to the mind of God. Our planet might have been, even uninhabited, very fit for all the mechanical purposes of it in the material system. But there may be other purposes which the creation of animals was necessary to answer, and since they were created, we ought to think that they were so for some purpose. It might be determined in the divine ideas, that there should be a gradation of life and intellect throughout the universe. In this case, it was necessary that there should be some creatures at our pitch of rationality, and others endued with all the degrees of life, sense, and intellect, which we observe in the several species, from the insect, up to men. This world might be allotted to such kinds and orders of animated beings, and though it was made for the universe, not for them, and to their well-being in the constitution of it. They were not made to be miserable. But even man was not made to be happier than it was consistent with this part of the material system, and with his own rank in the intellectual that he should be." Lord Bolingbroke, *Fragment of Essays*, 43.

On Lord Brougham's opinion of the value of Miracles, as evidence of the credibility of a person claiming to have come from God.

[Note to page 116.]

Of all the extraordinary notions entertained by philosophers on the subject of miracles, the one urged by Lord Brougham, in his *Discourse on Natural Theology*, seems to me the strangest. Suppose "says his Lordship," it were shown by incontrovertible proofs, that a messenger sent immediately from heaven had appeared on the earth;—suppose, to make the case more strong against our argument, that this messenger arrived in our own days, nay, appeared before our eyes, and showed his divine title to have his message believed, by performing miracles in our presence. No one can by possibility imagine a stronger case, for it excludes all arguments upon the weight or the fallibility of testimony; it assumes all the ordinary difficulties in the way of revelation to be got over. Now even this strong evidence, would not at all establish the truth of the doctrine promulgated by the messenger, for it would not show that the story he brought was worthy of belief in any one particular, except his supernatural powers. These would be demonstrated by his working miracles. All the rest of his statement would rest on his assertion. But a being capable of working miracles, might very well be capable of deceiving us. This messenger might come from an evil, as well as from a good being; he might come from more beings than one; or he might come from one being of many existing in the universe."

In order to determine the truth of a message, sustained by miraculous evidence, it is necessary, according to Lord Brougham, that we perceive the moral excellence, and beneficial tendency, of the message itself.

This is Realism in its superlative degree! and our discourse on that subject in a former page, cannot be now termed unimportant, for if such a person as Lord Brougham has fallen into the delusions of Realism, what are we to suppose is the case with inferior men.

A man, representing himself to be a messenger from the Creator of all things, in proof of his mission, exhibits an undoubted miracle: nevertheless, says Lord Brougham, we cannot tell whether the being enabling the man to perform this miracle is good, or evil, supreme, or subordinate. Let this be so, nevertheless, no one can undertake to deny that all may be, precisely as the messenger has represented things to be, and *this possibility entirely neutralizes the possibility of the contrary supposition*. We, therefore, stand upon equal ground *as to possibility*, and we must, therefore, of necessity, determine the credibility of the messenger performing the miracle, by an unavoidable reference to those principles of knowledge, or experience, by which a rational man is alone guided in making his conclusion, or judgment. Now, which is the most rational proceeding? to believe a man who exhibits an undoubted miracle in confirmation of the truth of his message, or to reject his message, and miracle, on the supposed possibility suggested by Lord Brougham.

To reject a miracle as evidence, we ought to have argument or evidence of a weight or value superior to that conveyed to us by the exhibition of the miracle. To reject the miracle upon the possibilities supposed by Lord Brougham, not only sets aside the contrary possibility without reason or argument, but it would not leave an ability in the supreme God himself to give any testimony of his own existence and power, for how could any one know that there was not another God still greater?

That Lord B. has fallen into a great oversight on this subject, will be further evident from the circumstance, that an eternal existence would not enable us to appreciate truth according to his views of its moral excellence. For, certainly, there may be as much fraud concealed behind a system that proposes things beneficial to mankind, as behind the brilliancy of miraculous display; and, when should we cease to mistrust the possibility of deceit lurking for the favorable opportunity to display itself? Eternity would not be sufficient, for the doubter could never arrive at the time, when the possibility of deceit would not exist.

The misjudgment of Lord B. on this subject, proceeds from his Realism, and from the influence of that mistaken notion, to which we have adverted in the note to page 9, viz. that incredulity is the natural condition of the human mind. We have there briefly shown, that this is not the fact, and that ignorance is our natural condition. Incredulity is a state of intellectual responsibility, whether on natural or religious subjects, and is only rational when justified by a sufficient view and knowledge of things. The incredulity of ignorant persons is absurd. They have no right to say they have any opinion.

To obtain evidence that shall guarantee us against all possibility of error, misapprehension, or delusion, is wholly impossible. Human nature, as being imperfect, cannot estimate things otherwise than with imperfection. Our opinions must be determined by what we presume to be the best evidence, and, I apprehend, that there can be found no rational man, who would not consider miraculous evidence undoubtedly such; as being the best or highest evidence that can be furnished to substantiate the truth of a messenger asserting he comes from God. If any man rejects such evidence, he certainly is bound by every principle of rationality, to justify his incredulity by the exhibition of argument or

evidence that is greater, or at least equivalent to the value of miraculous evidence. If he cannot furnish evidence of equivalent value, he is either foolish or insincere that pretends to be guided by evidence of a far inferior weight.

On the supposed agency of the Jewish Priesthood in the celebration of the Passover.

[Note to page 311.]

As it is a common notion among the great body of Christians, that the Jewish priests had an agency in the celebration of the paschal supper, I deem it of sufficient importance to confute that notion, and show the utter absurdity of such a theory.

It is certainly the doctrine of the Jews who follow the authority of the rabbis, that in the celebration of the passover, the lamb was taken to the temple, and was there slain by the person who brought it. The blood was then handed, according to the rabbis, to the priest, who sprinkled it upon the altar, and without this was done, the passover could not be eaten. If this be true, then certainly the priest had a direct and most important agency in the paschal supper.

In the various rules given by Moses concerning the administration of the passover rites, there is not a word said concerning the priesthood; and that it was altogether an act to be performed by the laity, is not only the plain inference of the Scripture, but the circumstances of the case render it absolutely incredible and impossible, that any others than laymen, could have performed the rite.

Without enumerating other particulars, we shall alone call the reader's attention to the fact, that Moses (Deut. xvi. 2 to 6) commanded that the paschal lamb should be slain "*at even, at the going down of the sun,*" and as the Hebrew word *even*, signifies *at the time of the mixture between day and night*, we would say, in the idiom of our language, during *the twilight*.

Now, as this twilight cannot, with any propriety, be extended to more than about half an hour in the latitude of Judea, it is utterly incredible that the blood of fifty thousand, much less a hundred thousand, or two hundred thousand lambs, could be offered and sprinkled on the altar in such a brief space of time, and it is, therefore, evident the priesthood had nothing to do with the passover.

As the rabbis however found that this absurdity was too gross to be received in itself, they have attempted to remedy their position by an additional statement, but which we shall soon show, that notwithstanding its flagrant perversion of the Scripture direction, will not lessen the outrageous absurdity of their whole doctrine.

As the rabbis found that *the twilight* was absolutely contradictory of their statement, they adopted the explanation that the time of *the going down* of the sun, meant from the time the sun began to deflect from its meridian heighth, and thus they have endeavored to obtain the whole afternoon instead of the twilight. But, as the evening sacrifice must first be offered, they had to loose by this circumstance so much time, that they can scarcely claim four hours to perform the paschal sacrifice.

Though even four hours were altogether insufficient to accomplish what the rabbis relate the priesthood performed, yet I will not confine my refutation of their statement to this circumstance, but will make use of another particular of their relation.

We are told by the rabbis, (see Lightfoot, Temple Service, chapter 12, section 3,) that whatever might be the number of paschal lambs to be

slain, the persons so slaying them, were divided into *three companies*, consequently, one-third of the whole number must stand and slay his lamb, skin, cleave, and salt it, at one and the same time, in the court of the temple. Now, Josephus tells us, (*Jewish War*, lib. vi. chap. 9.) that on a certain occasion, there were 256 500 lambs sacrificed. As each lamb was slain by a single person, we must, therefore, find room in the court of the temple for 85,500 persons, to be thus occupied at the same moment of time.

Now the courts of Israel, and of the priests, in which the rabbis assert the paschal lambs were slain, were together 187 cubits long, by 135 cubits broad, (*Lightfoot*, *Prosp. Temp.*, chapter xxxiii.) which, when reduced to our measurement, will give an area of 6,307 square yards. But, from this we must deduct the ground occupied by the temple itself, the altars, tables, steps, desks for the Levites, rings for sacrifice, &c., which, together, cannot be less than one-third of the whole area. After making this deduction, and allowing but one square yard to each person slaying and skinning his lamb, and supposing not a single foot of ground unequally occupied or lost, we shall find room for 4,200 persons to stand in. But as there were required a great many rows of priests to hand the blood along from the assembly until it reached the altar, and as the Levitical choir had to stand there and sing the *hallel*, we must make a further deduction of the room of—I do not know how many hundred persons. But, surely, the absurdity of this statement of the rabbis is sufficiently clear without further exhibition. We required room for 85,500 persons, and we find it utterly impossible that even 4,000 could have ever stood in the court at one time.

Confined to the limits of a note, I cannot enlarge further on this subject, though it is one deserving our attention. The statement made in 2 Chron. xxx. 17, is a corruption of the text, directly in opposition to the institution of Moses, as any one who can read them can perceive. See Numbers ix. 6 to 12. The quotation from 2 Chron. xxxv. 10, 12, &c. is equally corrupt, for it says this was done as it was written in the law of Moses. As the two books of Chronicles were perfected by rabbi Simon the Just, (according to Prideaux, years B. C. 446, 459,) who added them to the canon, it is probable that these passages were corrupted by his hand, either through inadvertence, or under the influence of rabbinical notions.

APPENDIX, No. 2.

On the Incredulity of the Jews concerning Jesus of Nazareth as being the Messiah.

[See page 223.]

IN beginning an attempt to appreciate the considerations that induced the Jews to reject Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, we must caution the reader not to fall into the error of supposing, that the Jewish people were situated as we are at the present time, who have nothing to prevent a calm investigation of the testimony laid before us, and fairly deducing the true answer. I have already shown that the prophecies on the subject of the Messiah are distinct as announcing the coming of a great and wonderful personage, and of his accomplishing a great moral revolution on the earth. Yet the particulars of the prophecies themselves, are so metaphorical and seemingly involved in circumstances so anomalous, that before the advent, it must have been impossible to have framed, with any regard to the strict propriety of the prophetic intimations, any clear view of the precise circumstances under which the Messiah should come, and proceed with the establishment of his sovereign dominion.

But the Jews, unfortunately, had not been restrained by any diffidence of their perceptions on this subject, and assuming as undoubted truth, that the advent of the Messiah would be to their immediate benefit, they had resolved upon what was most suitable to their temporal prosperity, and this they awaited with anxious expectation to receive from his hands, the moment he should be manifested to them. And though they did acknowledge that all the nations of the earth should be benefited by his advent, they considered all this to be of mere secondary importance to the exaltation and glory of the Jewish nation.

But Jesus of Nazareth came to the Jews in a position altogether adverse to their expectation. When John the Baptist announced to them that this person was the Messiah, they appear to have followed him in considerable numbers, wondering at his miracles, and in daily expectation of his proceeding to their immediate deliverance from the Roman yoke. But seeing that he attempted nothing of this kind, in a very little time, they fell off from him, while he, seemingly averse to announce himself publicly to be the Messiah, traversed Judea, proclaiming every where that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and performing miracles of a most benevolent kind, wherever he went. In the course of this ministry, he was continually brought into collision with the rabbis and scribes, whom he grievously offended, and with them all other bigots, by denouncing the corrupt doctrines and practices they taught the people. He asserted the rabbis to be blind leaders of the blind,

many of them worldly minded hypocrites, and that they had made the law of Jehovah naught, through their observance of the traditions of the elders. During all this time, he made no open claim to be the Messiah, though that impression prevailed among the people generally, who saw the marvels he performed, but not until his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, (Math. xxi.) did he distinctly and openly avow his claim to that title.

By this time the scribes or learned men, and the sects both of Pharisees and Sadducees, were formally arrayed in hostility against him, in consequence of the denunciations he had urged against their corruptions of the law of Jehovah, and now his open assumption of the title of Messiah, under a condition of life, and a procedure so directly opposed to their theory on that subject, urged them to the utmost degree of hatred and opposition against him. Full of deadly hostility, they did every thing they could to compass his destruction, and having extorted his condemnation from the unwilling Roman governor, he was put to death amidst insulting taunts as a blasphemer and impostor.

But during the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the admirable doctrines he taught, the apparent fulfilment of many prophecies in his advent, and the extraordinary miracles he constantly performed, had excited the most favorable expectations from many thousands of the less bigoted people. But the prejudices of their education were so inveterate, that they could not discern the religious errors into which they had been plunged by their teachers, nor cease to expect the Messiah as a temporal prince. Hence in a state of entire mental perplexity as to what they ought to believe concerning Jesus of Nazareth, they awaited some more signal manifestation of his real character.

When these perplexed and doubting persons saw him put to death, their hopes and expectations perished, and they considered him alas to have been a deceiver of the people.

But after the day of Pentecost, when the disciples came forth with that supernatural power with which they had been invested, and when the people saw the miracles that were done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and when the apostles showed how largely the prophecies had been fulfilled in his advent, in his life, and in his ignominious death, than those that had before doubted in the simplicity of ignorant prejudices, could disbelieve no more, but were converted by thousands to the Christian faith.

But the Jewish rabbis, the bigots, and all influenced by them, were unaffected by the accomplishment of prophecy, and display of miracle exhibited by the apostles in the name of Jesus Christ. They persisted in their unbelief, and persecuted those who left the traditionary faith of their fathers, until the time of vengeance approached, and Jehovah destroyed their city and nation, and dispersed the unhappy survivors into all the regions of the earth.

To find a sufficient natural reason why the Jews continued to reject Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, after they had witnessed the miraculous exhibitions made by him, and his immediate disciples for near forty years together, is therefore seemingly impossible.

He was of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David, he was born of a virgin at Bethlehem. He came at the end of Daniel's prophetic week, and when he came, the sceptre was no longer in Jewish hands. He had fulfilled a most philanthropic and benevolent ministry, in healing all manner of diseases and afflictions. He had been a man of sorrow and afflictions, he had found his death with the wicked, and his grave had been with the rich. His hands, his feet, and his side had been pierced, and not a bone had been broken. He was asserted to have risen

from the dead, and to have taken possession of an everlasting throne as foretold by the prophets; and his kingly power was manifested by the signs and wonders, that he enabled his followers to perform by invoking his name. These evidences, besides other prophecies that were daily fulfilling around in the conversion of the Gentiles, seem to us ought to have been sufficient to convince any one, that the Messiah was not such a person as Jewish theory had from mere anticipation of prophecy expected; and a mere human doctrine on that subject, ought to have given way to the evident fulfilment of so large an amount of prophecy, further attested by the open exhibition of miraculous power.

But the great stumbling block to the Jews on this subject, was their infatuation with respect to the traditional observances of the Mosaic law, in which their learning and religion were at that time, wholly absorbed. The institutions which they had received from Jehovah, through Moses, had been appointed them to keep for ever, and they could not comprehend how any one claiming to be the anointed Messiah, could arraign them as blinded and hypocrites, and of breaking the commands of Jehovah, when they considered they were glorifying him by these very observances.

But their error on this subject, had been sufficiently pointed out to them by Jesus of Nazareth himself, for those doctrines that he condemned, were not ordinances of Moses, but of mere men who had added their precepts to the law of Jehovah, in express disobedience to his commandment that they should neither add to, nor diminish from, his requirements. As every Jew knew of these precepts of Deut. iv. 2, xii. 32, it would seem to us, that every rational man could easily see by referring to the Pentateuch, what were the commands of Jehovah, and if they found they had adopted any doctrine or practice not enacted there, it would seem to be the unavoidable conclusion that their doctrine or practice was a precept of men, and so far wrong as being an addition to the law of God.

Jesus told them expressly, he had not come to destroy the law of Moses, but to fulfil it, and never contemplated, as far as I can see, the abrogation of that law as it concerned the Jewish people.* What he required, was that they should disregard the traditions of the elders, the constructive precepts of the rabbis, worship Jehovah as he had appointed them by Moses, and receive himself as the Messiah.

* I apprehend the Christian world, generally speaking, entertain a very erroneous doctrine on this subject. Taylor of Norwich, in his paraphrase on the Romans, chap. xiv. seems to have the best views on this subject of any writer with whom I am acquainted. We cannot, however, take the room necessary to lay them fully before the reader. After quoting all those passages from the New Testament, which state the various instances in which the apostles conformed to mere Judaical institutions, he makes the following rational observation, "The rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses was incorporated into the civil state of the Jews, and so might be considered as national and political usages. Now as the gospel did not interfere with, or subvert any national polity upon earth, but left all men in all the several countries of the globe to live in all things not sinful, according to the civil constitution under which it found them; so it left the Jews also at liberty to observe all the rites and the injunctions of the law of Moses, considered as a part of the civil and political usages of the nation."

In short the establishment of Christianity, if it had been received by the Jews, need not have set aside scarcely a single institution of Moses. Even the sacrifices themselves might have been continued, only that henceforth they must be considered commemorative, instead of being as heretofore typical of the Redeemer's sacrifice.

But however plain and simple the course was that the Jews ought to have taken on this subject, we find they obstinately refused to change their doctrines, they closed their ears against argument, and they resisted the evidence afforded them in the miracles performed for their conversion. Nothing was sufficient to convince them, they persisted in regarding Jesus of Nazareth as an impostor, and his followers to be an ignorant deluded multitude.

The only intelligible ground that the Jews could have taken to justify so unreasonable a proceeding, as far as I can appreciate their conduct, seems to have been, that, as they believed, at the time of our Saviour's advent, in magic and demoniacal agencies, so they might have imagined that the miracles performed by Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples were permitted by Jehovah, that he might try them, as was intimated by the statement made by Moses in Deut. xiii. 1 to 3, &c.

"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,

And the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other gods which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;

Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, *for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."*

But the Jews must have been miserably blinded in their intellectual perceptions, if the preceding verses could be supposed applicable to Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples, for they did not teach that they should forsake the God of their fathers and worship another God; they alone urged men to worship Jehovah, and by their instrumentality alone, the worship of Jehovah has been carried to the ends of the earth.

As the case of the false prophet, as stated above, is wholly inapplicable to the history of Jesus of Nazareth, it is incredible that persons in the possession of their senses could have been influenced by such a notion, and in thus setting aside the only consideration I can suppose they might have misapplied, I come directly to the conclusion, that the Jewish rejection of Jesus Christ was the most unreasonable proceeding ever exhibited in the history of mankind, and that so marvellous a degree of incredulous obstinacy, is not to be explained, as far as I can perceive by any reference to ordinary views of human nature.

From the prophetic writings, however, we can derive a solution to this otherwise inexplicable incredulity, and which not only removes every difficulty towards understanding that subject, but it distinctly shows how the very particulars of prophecy were fulfilled that had previously announced the Jews would reject the Messiah when he should come, and which was exactly fulfilled though they held these very prophecies in their hands.

To explain this remarkable circumstance I must inform the reader that, among the various judgments that God declared should befall the Jewish nation in case they should disregard his commandments, was the one of intellectual blindness and infatuation. This particular judgment was formally announced to the Jews just before they took possession of the land of Canaan, Deut. xxviii. 28, 29, and was from time to time, under various exhibitions, brought to their consideration by several of the prophets who urged them to amend their ways before Jehovah. Of these prophetic warnings, the most remarkable is that of Isaiah xxix. 9 to 14, who not only predicts that the deepest intellectual infatuation should, in the course of time, fall upon the Jews, but he also announced for what particular transgression such a judgment should be inflicted.

The prophet, in a vision, sees the future condition of the Jewish nation, and informs us of its particulars in the following language:

"Stay yourselves and wonder: cry ye out, and cry, they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.

For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes; the prophets and your rulers, the seers, hath he covered.

And the vision of all, (*i. e. the whole scope of prophecy*), is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, (fastened up,) which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, read this I pray thee; and he saith I cannot, for it is sealed.

And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, read this I pray thee, and he saith I am not learned."

The prophet, in the preceding verses, distinctly apostrophises some future intellectual bewilderment of the Jewish people, comparing it to the condition of persons intoxicated with strong drink, who reel and stagger about, destitute of reason and judgment.

The prophet, in short, exhibits them in that moral condition which we now designate by the term of judicial blindness. The professors of religion termed the prophets, the rulers, and the people generally, the learned and the unlearned alike, are represented as laboring under an intellectual stupefaction that rendered them regardless of things that arrest the attention of those in complete possession of their senses and faculties. In consequence of which judicial stupor, the revelations that God had communicated to the nation by the prophets, of his future purposes, and which were most essentially relative to the Messiah, had become undiscernable and unprofitable to them. They were as unintelligible to them as the contents of an unopened book is to a learned man, or as a book is unintelligible to an ignorant man who has never learned to read. Both comparisons exhibiting, with the utmost distinctness, that there would be a time when the whole scope and subject of the prophetic intimations should become wholly unintelligible to the Jewish people.

But why did Jehovah thus visit the Jewish people? Why did he bring this moral stupor and blindness upon them? The prophet informs us very positively in the verses immediately following those we have just quoted:

"Wherefore the Lord said, forasmuch as (*i. e. since or because*) this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me, is taught by the precept of men;

Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."

Though the import of these verses be very clear, let us analyse their remarkable significance, lest any just inference escape our attention. Jehovah does not here charge the Jews with any immorality, idolatry, or other rebellion against him, not even with a neglect of his service. On the contrary, he says expressly, they do draw near *me* with their mouth, they do honor *me* with their lips, but their hearts or their affections they have removed far from *me*. Their reverence of *me* is determined by the precepts of men, and not according to my requirements. In other words, they have substituted a service of *will worship*, a religion of their own devising, instead of the one I had commanded them. Wherefore I will cause a marvellous exhibition of judgment on them. The understanding of these will-worshippers shall fail them altogether, and the judgment of their wise men shall utterly perish.

Nothing, therefore, can be clearer than that this prophecy should be ful-

filled in some future time on the Jews, and, as our Saviour did quote this very prophecy as being applicable to the Jews of his era,* so I apprehend there can be no difficulty in considering that the extraordinary and otherwise unaccountable incredulity of the Jews, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, is solved in the fact, that they were then actually laboring under deep intellectual infatuation, occasioned by that amount of prejudices, will-
orship, and superstition, which had been accumulating among them gradually from an early age, through the precepts and teachings of men, and on the observance of which things, the prophetic denunciation of Isaiah was expressly based.

Though I apprehend that our Saviour's application of this remarkable prophecy to the Jews of his time, and his frequent reproach to them concerning their observance of human doctrines and traditions, entirely justifies the theory we have advanced on this subject; yet we can adduce some presumptive evidence from other considerations, to show that an intellectual stupefaction, almost amounting to insanity, prevailed among the Jews, at times so near the advent, that I apprehend no reasonable man can doubt that its actual influences must have prevailed, in a greater or less degree, at the very time the Redeemer was upon earth. The first evidence on this point which may be deemed palpable to any intelligent man, is the proceeding of the Jews before and during the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, of which any one can judge who will read Josephus. The second proof I shall exhibit, is from evidence furnished by the insane Talmud, of Babylon, which, as being written but 150 years after Christ in order to preserve the traditions of their fathers, will carry us up so near to the advent that it requires no unreasonable stretch of our historical faith to consider the doctrines taught in the Talmud prevailed both at and before our Saviour's advent.

That the conduct of the Jews both before and during the siege of Jerusalem, is alone explainable by the supposition that they were in a state of infatuation, intermingled with actual insanity, I apprehend no one can doubt who will read the works of Josephus, but since his history is one of the commonest books among us, I shall refer the reader to it without making any extracts from its statements.

But our argument as derived from the authority of the Talmud with the Jews at so early a period as that in which it was written, is alone procurable from sources more inaccessible to general readers, I shall, therefore, lay before them such an exhibition of the Talmud, that any one shall be able to determine this point to his own satisfaction.

The history of the Talmud may be briefly stated. It appears from that book, that the Jews, from an unknown time previous to its publication, had held the extraordinary doctrine, that when God revealed the law to Moses at Mount Sinai, that he also made him a private revelation of its significance, and communicated information on a number of other subjects that are not even hinted at in the written law. This oral or traditional law, Moses was forbidden to put in writing, but was to communicate it verbally to Aaron and certain of his sons, and they, in their generations, to others successively. This proceeding the Jews very minutely detail, and name the individuals by whom the oral law was transmitted from the time of Moses until that of rabbi Judah Hakkodesh, who, A. D. 150, undertook to commit it to writing that it might be preserved from the apparently inevitable destruction, which, at that time, seemed likely to overwhelm the rabbis and their schools.

That I may furnish the reader with the best means in my power to

* See Matt. xiii. 14, 15, xv. 7, 8, 9; Mark vii. 6 to 9, 13. Also Acts of the Apostles xxviii. 25 to 28.

rightly estimate the Talmudic writings, I shall lay before him several extracts from Purchas's Pilgrims, which furnish us with many details taken from those books, together with sundry rabbinical commentaries.

"The rabbis say Moses, on Mount Sinai, was not with God forty days and forty nights *to keep geese*; for that God could have written those tables of the law in an hour, and sent him away with them, so to have prevented that idolatry with the *golden calf*. But God brought Moses into a school, and there gave him the law, first in writing, and then, in all that long time, expounded the same, showing the cause, manner, measure, foundation, and intention thereof, in the true sense. This unwritten and verbal law did Moses teach Joshua, he the elders, and from these it was derived to the prophets. After Zachariah and Malachi, the last of the prophets, it came to the great Sanhedrim, and after them by tradition from father to son."

"Rabbi Bechai saith that Moses learned the written law in the day-time, and the traditional law by night, for then he could not see to write. Rabbi Mosche Mikkotzi says, the cause why God would deliver the same by mouth only, was, lest the Gentiles should pervert this, as they did the other that was written. And, in the day of judgment, when God shall demand who are the Israelites, the Gentiles shall make challenge, because of the *law written*, but the Jews only shall be accepted as having the *verbal exposition*."

"In one of the rabbinical books, printed at Cremona, A. D. 1556, is this sentence: think not that the WRITTEN LAW is the foundation, but rather the *traditional law* is the right foundation, and according to this *law*, did God make covenant with the Israelites, for God foresaw their captivity in time to come, and, therefore, lest the people, among whom they should dwell, should write out and interpret this law as they did the other, God would not have it written. And though, in process of time, this law be now written, yet it is not explained by the Christians because it is hard, and requireth a sharp wit."

"In the Talmud it is said, to study and read in the Bible is a small virtue, but to learn the *Mischna*, (or Talmud text,) is a virtue worthy reward, and to learn the *Gemara*, (the compliment to the Talmud,) by heart, is a virtue so great that nothing can be greater. The wise men (i. e. rabbis) they say are more excellent than the prophets, and the words of the Scribes more lovely than those of the prophets; and, therefore, the one were forced to confirm them with miracles, while the other (i. e. the words of the rabbis) are simply to be believed, as is said in Deut. xvii. 10.

"They further say that nothing is more excellent than the holy Talmud: and that it is impossible to stand on the foundation of the written law, but by the traditional law. To dissent from his doctor (rabbi) is as to dissent from God, to believe the words of the wise is as to believe God himself," &c.

"Hence it is that rabbins are more exercised in their Talmud than in the Bible, as that on which their faith is founded more than on the other, and according to this do they expound the Scripture. And, as their Talmud is most certain, so also is that (whatsoever) exposition of their rabbins, according to the same. Thus saith rabbi Isaac Abuhabh, whatsoever our rabbins in their sermons and mystical explanations have spoken, we are no less firmly to believe than the law of Moses. And if any thing therein seem repugnant to our sense, we must impute it to the weakness of our conceit and not to their words," &c.

When two rabbis (saith the Talmud) maintain contrary opinions, yet must not men contradict them, because both of them have his cabala or tradition for the same. You must believe the words of the rabbi as is expounded by Jarchi upon Deut. xvii. 12. *Thou shalt not decline from the word that they shall show thee, to the right hand or the left*, i. e. says

Jarchi, when a rabbi saith unto thee of the right hand, that it is the left, and of the left hand, that it is the right, thou must believe it," &c.

That many individuals among the rabbis have been actually insane, I apprehend is the only conclusion we can make from many of the relations made in the Talmud, of which we shall now exhibit some few extracts. The following I have taken from Purchas's Pilgrims:

"Some of the rabbis have written in the Talmud, that God, before the creation of this world, to keep himself from idleness, made and marred other worlds. That he spends three hours a day in reading the Jewish law. That Moses one day, ascending to heaven, found God writing accents to the words of the law. That God once whipped the angel Gabriel, for some great fault, with a whip of fire."

In the days of the Messiah, when God shall make a feast for his people, shall be slain Behemoth, that great beast, that feedeth on a thousand hills, whose magnitude is ascertained by the rabbis from the fiftieth Psalm, "all the beasts of the forests are mine, and *the cattle upon a thousand hills.*" The rabbis have asserted that God originally made two such beasts, each of which required the herbage of one thousand hills for its daily subsistence; but fearing the famine that should ensue from two such voracious monsters, he gelded the male, and killed and salted the female to be used in the day of this anticipated feast.

At this feast also shall be cooked the great bird called Bariuchne, of whom the Talmud says, that an egg once falling out of her nest, overthrew and broke down three hundred tall cedars; with which fall the egg being broken, overflowed and washed away sixty villages.

But let these specimens suffice; I could, from Purchas and other writers, add several pages of similar tales equally extravagant and incredible; what then must be yet buried in the Talmud which has never been translated?

In the midst of these things so wonderful to our common sense, are to be found wise and excellent sayings, and judgments that render the aberration of their understandings still more apparent. And it is incomprehensible how men could write such amazing nonsense at one time, and good sense at another, unless they were judicially blinded. If a single person or so should have written in this manner, we should have no difficulty in considering him insane through natural infirmity; but when we see the *teachers and wise men* of a whole nation receiving such writings with all reverence, who can mistake the fulfilment of judicial sentence pronounced by the prophet Isaiah?

It seems hardly necessary to inform the reader that the Talmud is in the highest reverence with the Jewish teachers at the present time. In their religious service for the feast of Pentecost, they exult in having received its expositions from God himself. The following extract from David Levi's translation of the Jewish ritual will sufficiently exhibit this matter:

"Therefore, from Mount Sinai they received the law, not from the mouth of an angel, nor was it delivered from the mouth of a messenger, but from the mouth of the king covered with light; he, the Omnipotent, whose reverence is purity, with his mighty word, he instructed his chosen, (i. e. Moses,) and clearly explained the law with the word, speech, commandment, and admonition, in the Talmud, the Agadah, the Mishna, and the Testament."

I have now exhibited, I trust, sufficient evidence to justify the belief that the Jews were actually involved in judicial blindness at the time of our Saviour's advent, and that the cause of his rejection by them, is especially referable to this remarkable circumstance. But as this subject is of great interest to the Christian world, I apprehend some further discourse to be

necessary, not only as exhibiting the peculiar proceeding of God towards the Jews, but because I consider the subject, in its direct application, to be of momentous importance to us of the present day, and which the Christian world, in general, seem not to appreciate. If our Saviour announced that the Jews of his day were obnoxious to a heavier judgment than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, in consequence of their superior privileges, to how much more grievous condemnation are we exposed, who have not considered this warning example of the Jews, and have too much fallen into practices like theirs.

The prophet Isaiah has very distinctly stated the offence for which God suffered this remarkable judgment to fall upon the Jews.

“For as much as this people draw near me with their mouths, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and *their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men;*

Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, *even a marvellous work and a wonder*, for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” Isaiah xxix. 13, 14.

To exhibit our subject in all the force that it requires, I must go back to the original covenant which God made with the Jews by the hands of Moses.

However much Jehovah had favored the Jews in his visible providence or in his spiritual dispensations, he always told them that he had not chosen them from their goodness and excellency, but from a gracious promise made to the patriarchs of the nation. And in bringing them into the land of Canaan as his chosen people, he promised his favor to them only on the condition that they should be obedient to his requirements and commands. Hence, the Jews were never freed a moment from the common trial, whether intellectual or moral, under which Jehovah has placed the whole human family. On the contrary, as their privileges had been so superior to other nations, so their intellectual and moral responsibilities were greater in the same degree.

Moses had announced to them, from time to time, a variety of laws and precepts whether religious or civil. He had informed them of every thing belonging to their duties whether to Jehovah or to man, and these ordinances or institutions he sums up in the book of Deuteronomy, at the close of his official intercourse with them, a little while preceding his death. The whole law and commandment was then formally recited to them in all its enactments. They were required to do this, and they were forbidden to do that, and as an effectual check to any improper construction of their obligations, *they were forbidden to either add to, or diminish from, the law thus given them.* Deut. iv. 1, 2; xii. 32.

Nothing can be more urgent than the language of Moses to the people to keep this entire and perfect law of God, and that they might comprehend their intellectual position, and the amount of their obligations, he assembled the whole body of the nation before him, as is thus minutely related: Deut. xxix. 10, 11, 12.

“Ye stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God.

Your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel.

Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood, unto the drawer of thy water.

That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day.”

These verses show how formally every individual Jew was addressed, for after Moses had called their attention to the fact that every individual of the nation, able to attend, was now before him, he then exhorts them

to observe and keep all the law of God, with all the heart, and with all the soul, assuring them that if they were obedient, the blessings enumerated in Deut. xxviii. 1 to 14, should be bestowed on them, but if they should disobey them, they should endure the infliction of the curses announced in Deut. xxviii. 15, *ad finem**

And least there should be any supposed difficulty in observing and keeping the entire law, Moses expressly addresses himself to the universal body of the people in the following clear and distinct manner: Deut. xxx. 11 to 15.

"For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it afar off.

It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it,

Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, who shall go over the sea for us and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it.

But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

Thus was the covenant established with the Jews. Jehovah had laid down for them a written law, enumerating every thing they were to do, and every thing they were not to do. As a consummation to the integrity of his commandments, they were forbidden either to add to or to diminish from his law. And finally every individual of adult years, was declared intellectually capable to construe the law for himself, and as such they were necessarily accountable in their individual responsibilities. Seeing, therefore, the extreme precision and clearness with which the law of Jehovah had been announced to the Jewish people, it is not, apparently, easy to explain how they could transgress his appointment so continually as we find related of them in the Scripture writings.

Many of their sins must, undoubtedly, be charged to the common infirmity of human nature, which the abundant experience of all time shows to be extremely ingenious in evading the force of our religious obligations, and in finding excuses to gratify our pride or sensuality. We also possess power to stifle the suggestions of conscience, when we can find no other excuse than that we are too weak to resist temptation. The history of the Jews, therefore, on the general question, is no more than that of any other people, and needs not that we should use any discourse on that point. But how they could fall into the sin of corrupting the law of God is not only difficult of comprehension, but deserving of the deepest investigation that we can make, to ascertain their procedure.

As far as I can detect the procedure of the Jews in this particular, it appears to me to have been accomplished from the following circumstance: Instead of considering themselves moral and intellectual beings, undergoing spiritual probation before Jehovah, they fell into the delusion of Realism that an outward formal obedience to the appointments that Jehovah had made, was an acceptable service to him, and regarding the institutions of Moses as being the express revelation of Jehovah, they imagined them to be holy and sanctifying ordinances in their literal sense and application. Thus when they were obedient, it was under the

*These curses were of various kinds, viz. see Deut. xxviii.

1st. An adverse providence in all their labors and employments, verses 16 to 20, 38 to 40, 42.

2d. Bodily diseases and afflictions, 21 to 24, 27, 35, 59 to 62.

3d. Subjection to and oppression by foreign nations, 25, 26, 30, 33, 36, 41, 43, 48 to 57, 64 to 68.

4th. Intellectual blindness and infatuation, 28, 29.

5th. A reproach among all nations, 37.

supposition that by their offerings, their sacrifices, their journeys to Jerusalem, their vows and prayers, they actually rendered a service that was in itself inherently grateful and acceptable to Jehovah, and under the influence of this delusion, they took a larger license to themselves in doing what they might find agreeable or expedient, since the means of meritorious service were always in their power.

The stupid notion that they could propitiate, by the sacrifice of an animal, the Deity, who had with a word made all the countless thousands of animals upon earth: or, that he was gratified with formal vows, fasts, or Pharisaical festivals on new moons, &c. undeniably prevailed with the Jews from a very remote antiquity, for we find the prophet Samuel remonstrating with Saul on this subject; and though succeeding prophets, continually set before them the absurdity of such a theory, yet all that they could do on this subject, however individuals may have been affected, would not prevail with the nation at large. They persisted in their perverse notions, and from time to time multiplied the institutions of their will-worship, until the religious service, appointed by Jehovah, was sensibly adulterated with the accumulating institutions of men. Gradually the Spirit of God ceased to strive with them, partially he hid his face from them, and left them more unrestrained to follow the preposterous system they had in the face of his commandments devised for themselves. From time to time he gave them warnings what the end of it should certainly be, and which, as being inscribed in the sacred records of the nation, so all who heard or read them, had warning to repent of their ways, and seek the favor of God in the manner *he had prescribed*.*

The denunciation of the prophet Isaiah, in his xix. chapter, was a remarkably emphatic warning to the Jews to change their practices, but they disregarded it, and persevered in a proceeding, which, as it continually grieved the Spirit of God, so he gradually gave them up to their delusion. Their will-worship and intellectual stupefaction grew together, until their offence, whether intellectual, moral, or religious, reached such

*The excellent archbishop Tillotson has made so just an exposition of the common proceeding of men on the subject of will-worship, that I have extracted his view in the following note.

"The plain truth of the matter is, men had rather religion should be any thing than what indeed it is, the thwarting and crossing of our vicious inclinations, the curing of our evil and corrupt affections, the due care and government of our unruly appetites and passions, the sincere endeavor and constant practice of all-holiness and virtue in our lives; and, therefore, they had much rather have something that might handsomely palliate and excuse their evil inclinations, than to extirpate them and cut them up; and rather than reform and amend their vicious lives, make God an honorable amends and compensation for them in some other way.

This has been the way and folly of mankind in all ages, to defeat the great end and design of religion and to thrust it by, by substituting something else in the place of it which they hope may serve the turn as well, and which hath the appearance of as much devotion and respect, and perhaps of more cost and pains, than that which God requires of them. Men have ever been apt thus to impose on themselves, and to please themselves with a conceit of pleasing God, full as well or better, by some other way than that which he hath pitched upon and appointed for them, not considering that God is a great king, and will be observed and obeyed by his creatures in his own way, and that obedience to what he commands, is better and more acceptable to him than any other sacrifice that we can offer, which he hath not required at our hands, that he is infinitely wise and good, and therefore the laws and rules which he hath given us to live *by* are more likely and certain means of our happiness, than any inventions and devices of our own." Tillotson, Sermon 203.

a consummation, "that there was no remedy," and God punished the Jewish nation by two captivities among the heathen. The population of the kingdom of Israel he never delivered, but those of Judah, after having been oppressed for seventy years at Babylon, he brought back again and placed them once more in that political condition, that they might, if they had pleased, have purified themselves from all the corruptions of their fathers, and have been established to the glory of his name, and their own prosperity whether temporal or spiritual.

After the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, the prophets solemnly reminded them of the offences that their fathers had been guilty of before Jehovah, and they warned them earnestly not to fall into similar transgressions. The first six verses of Zachariah very distinctly state this subject, and in various other passages were the Jews reminded of what Jehovah had spoken by the former prophets, that they should obey the law as taught them by Moses.

All these considerations, therefore, should have sent the Jews back to the Pentateuch, which they could now study with greater advantage than their fathers ever enjoyed; for they had the historical books of the Old Testament and writings of the prophets to serve as a commentary on the law, and every denunciation there made, stood as instruction and warning to them against any improper proceeding. The law of Moses thus announced to them as their only rule, instructed them in every thing that God required them to do, and every thing they were not to do. The enactment of Deut. iv. 2, xii. 32, that they were neither to add to, nor diminish from, the law, was as obligatory upon them as it was upon their fathers, and the right and ability of every individual to understand the law for himself was still as much in force as ever. It was not in heaven, nor beyond the sea, but it was as in the days of Moses, before them to understand and obey it if they would. But however plain the course was that the Jews should have followed on this subject, they unfortunately pursued a system that led them more and more astray from the law of God, and which ultimately brought the heaviest judgments upon them.

That we may have a correct understanding of the circumstances that influenced the Jewish people after their return from the Babylonian captivity, and which gradually produced an entire departure from the spirituality of the law of Jehovah, we must make a brief historical exposition.

Not only the great body of the laity, but the priesthood themselves, had lived at Babylon during the captivity, in great disregard of the law of Moses. Whether this proceeded from any oppression they endured there, or from a careless irreligious disregard of those institutions under which they had been placed by God, I cannot undertake to determine, but their disregard or ignorance of the law is very eminent in the fact, that many of the priests had intermarried with heathen women. Of this striking violation of the law we are distinctly informed in Ezra x. and of the great trouble he had to induce such to part with their heathen wives. From the best mean we have of judging, these improper marriages continued to profane the priesthood for many years after the return from Babylon.

It is also evident there was the greatest ignorance of the law itself, both among priests and people, in the fact, that they had lost the use of their own language to so great a degree during their captivity, that they were obliged to have the Old Testament writings explained to them through the medium of the Chaldee language, which they had acquired in the land of Babylon. The sacred volume had been greatly disregarded, and probably was collected together with no little labor by Ezra,

for it is computed, by Prideaux, that Ezra did not read the law to the people, or publish the corrected volume of Scripture, until about 95 years after the first body of liberated captives had returned to Jerusalem under the decree of Cyrus. (Prideaux year 444.)

In consequence of this reading of the law by Ezra, the people became sensible how flagrantly they had violated its injunctions and many of the priests, rulers, and people, entered into a solemn written covenant before Jehovah to keep the law, and especially they bound themselves to observe the following requirements, which distinctly shows how irreligious the times were. (See Nehemiah chap. x. 30 to 38.) The particulars they more especially bound themselves to observe, were

Not to marry with the heathen, 30.

To observe the Sabbath, 31.

To observe the Sabbatical year, 31.

To abstain from usury, 31.

To pay the $\frac{1}{3}$ of a shekel for the service of the temple, 32, 33.

To bring first fruits to temple, 35, 37.

To redeem the first born, 36.

To pay the Levites their tithes, 37.

But notwithstanding the exertions of Ezra or Nehemiah, the Jews in general appear to have concerned themselves but slowly in reformation of their irreligious practices, for we find about 16 years after this time, according to Prideaux, (Nehem. xiii.) that Eliashib the high priest, had accommodated Tobiah an Ammonite, and enemy to the Jewish people, with a lodging in the very temple itself.

In the same chapter it is also related, that either by fraud or culpable neglect, the Levites had not been supported in their functions, and the consequence was they had left the temple to labor for their subsistence. These matters were both remedied by Nehemiah; but he complains bitterly that the Sabbath was openly profaned, and that the people and even the son of the high-priest had yet contracted marriages with the heathen.—Nehem. xiii. 15 to 21, 28 to 29.

To this account we might add sundry matters to be gleaned from the prophets Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi, who all wrote during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but, as we are limited in our digressions, we shall omit them.

Having thus shown how great was the ignorance of the Jews after the return from Babylon, concerning the law of Moses, and how little they governed themselves by its enactments, we must now state, that the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah tended greatly to induce a better condition of things. Through the care of Ezra, the Jews had been provided with the written law, and by his authority, as is generally supposed, synagogues had been established throughout the land, in which the law was read and expounded every Sabbath day.

The concurrence of so many means to enlighten and instruct, accompanied with a general prosperity and exemption from national calamity, which endured about 240 years,* gradually aroused the Jews to study the law of Moses, but under the influence of the following considerable disadvantage, they had used the Chaldee language at Babylon to such an extent, that it prevailed ultimately over their ancient form of speech, so that in a few years after their restoration, the Hebrew became a

* From about the year B. C. 409 to 170, or a period of two hundred and thirty-nine years, the Jews though occasionally troubled, suffered no national calamity. But from this time they endured cruel oppressions from the nefarious princes around them, and a profligate administration at home, until their misery received its consummation by the Romans under Titus.

dead language, alone understood by those who applied themselves to its study.

In the desire of the Jews to re-establish all things on the ancient foundations, arose a greater or less degree of reverence to the instructions of those, who had either been taught by persons who lived before the desolation of Jerusalem, or at least held at second-hand the doctrines of such persons. Such authorities being gradually brought in to explain the law now studied after so long disuse, insensibly gave rise to that most portentous doctrine of the Jews, concerning the traditions of the elders, which ultimately wholly perverted the simplicity of the written law, and substituted in its place the most extraordinary system of teaching and precept the world has ever seen.

Nothing seems to us more wonderful than that the Jews should fall into this system of regarding their ancient rabbis with respect, for these teachers had lived before the captivity, and were involved in all the iniquities of the times for which Jehovah had punished the nation. Consequently the more they conformed to the ancient rabbis, the more they made themselves like those whom Jehovah had visited with his displeasure.

The proper course of the Jews was to follow the recommendations of their prophets, who earnestly urged them to an obedience to the law of God as set forth in the books of Moses. But instead of this, they appear to have exerted themselves not to understand Moses in the simplicity of his communications, but to recover the expositions, commentaries, and doctrines, which their fathers had entertained on the subject. The moment that such a system was admitted, the responsibility of individual consciences was silenced, and a door was opened for the admission of the most unbounded influx of notions and opinions, that whether correctly or incorrectly, might have been connected with the name of some ancient rabbi.

It was the natural consequence to such a proceeding, that the Jews should gradually lose sight of the fact, that their religious obedience depended alone upon the conscientious discharge of their duties as individual free agents, undergoing moral probation before Jehovah, and it is equally intelligible how they should fall into the pernicious doctrines of Realism, in attributing something inherently excellent in their law and its several institutions. They, therefore, strictly observed the literal precepts of the law, but without any spiritual discernment, they multiplied the services of the law, and by inferences and analogies, they gradually extended its requirements to almost every act in which men could be employed. In so doing they imagined they were glorifying Jehovah, not considering that he alone requires the heart and affections of his creatures, and that it must be evidently impossible to please him by any homage or service, no matter how expensive or painful it might be, which the Deity had not required. Their will-worship, however, was not simply superogatory, but actually set aside that one which he had appointed for them to observe.

Hence the will-worship of the Jews and their spiritual discernment of the law, were in an inverse proportion, they made things of little or no importance to be matters of great value, and they overlooked things of great consequence as if they were nothing.

As it is impossible for any thing to be clearer than the commands or the prohibitions of Jehovah, as stated in the law of Moses, so it must be evident, that any attempt to enlarge their significance would be to render them less clear and intelligible, and the consequence of accumulating impertinent expositions upon the law, would be, that sooner or later the direct spiritual sense of the precepts would become overwhelmed in those

fanciful and mystical meanings, which a perverse ingenuity might multiply almost to infinitude. This procedure we can distinctly trace in the Jewish church. First arose the authority of their traditions, concerning the observance of their laws, afterwards came the Talmuds, and finally came the boundless extravagances of the Caballa.

With every step of this deteriorating process, the Spirit of Jehovah the only source of true wisdom and knowledge, was grieved, and its influences were withheld from the nation more and more with the lapse of time, so that the continual progress of their will-worship, was facilitated by the increasing amount of their judicial blindness. Jehovah, as it were, giving them up to follow their perverse imaginations, unrestrained by his spiritual influence.

Though we are unable to show the reader to what precise extent the Jews had departed from the spirituality of God's law, through their observance of the doctrines and precepts of men, at any time preceding the advent, yet, from certain observations of the evangelists,* and from the fact that they were so blind as to charge our Saviour and his disciples with impiety in profaning the Sabbath, when they miraculously did works of mercy and benevolence to the sick and the afflicted, we can hardly suppose their perversion of sense and Scripture to have been less than it was in those more modern times, when they committed their doctrines to writing, and which they themselves assert had prevailed among them from an early time of their history.

Though we have no idea of using the Jewish theory on this subject, according to their exhibition, we shall make use of it so far as may be sufficient to justify our view, that the following notions or doctrines were actually in force, at, and before the coming of our Saviour, and by which the reader may be able to form a reasonable notion of that system of will-worship that prevailed among them at the time of his manifestation.

It was the appointment of Jehovah that they should do no work on the Sabbath. This matter, if spiritually considered, is so plain, that every one can keep this commandment without any perplexity. But, under the teaching of the rabbis, we find that though their observance of the Sabbath was burthensome in its minute details, yet the spirituality of God's commandment was lost sight of altogether.

In the first place, the matters to be regarded in keeping the Sabbath, are enumerated by the rabbis under *thirty-nine different heads*. Among these various particulars, which necessarily include every act almost that men could be engaged in, are the following:

If a Jew feeds his fowls with grain on the Sabbath, he must take the greatest care that none of it remain where it might sprout and grow, for if that took place, he had sown seed on the Sabbath day, which was a forbidden work.

The rabbis have further prohibited or discouraged persons from walking in the grass on the Sabbath, lest they should *pull it up* with their feet. Or to hang any thing on the bough of a tree *lest it break*. No one could eat fruit of any kind that was plucked on the Sabbath. If the house in which a Jew lived took fire on the Sabbath, it was unlawful to carry any thing out but the food, raiment, and necessities, required for that single day. To do more than this, would be *to bear a burthen* on the Sabbath.

On the Sabbath a horse might have a halter or bridle put on to lead him, but he that led him must let it hang so loose, that it may seem he rather carried it than led the horse.

*See Math. xiii. 15. xv. 1 to 6. 14. xxiii. 16 to 24. Mark vii. 8, 9, 13.

They must not wear clogs or pattens on their feet on the Sabbath, for that would be carrying a burthen.

There are other rabbinical precepts, concerning Sabbatical observances, that I am unable to discern in what the offence consisted. I shall, therefore, alone enumerate them without any conjecture on that point.

A hen may not wear a rag sewed on her leg, this mark must be taken off before the commencement of the Sabbath. A tailor may not wear a needle sticking on his garment. The lame man may use a staff, the blind not on that day. It is lawful to carry a plaister on a sore, but if it fall off, they must not put it on again. If a man soils his hands on the Sabbath, he may not wipe them clean on a towel, but he is innocent if he use a cow or horse's tail. If a flea bite, he may remove it, but not kill it, a louse he may kill; but the rabbis disagree on this question, for rabbi Eleazar says, one may as well kill a camel. If an article was carried on one shoulder it was a burthen, but not so if it required both.

God in the Scripture has said, *ye shall sanctify my Sabbaths*. To do this properly, the rabbis inform us those things must be done on the Sabbath which tend to the honor of the day. Among other matters, to prepare better food than on ordinary days. The Talmud relates that a butcher of Cyprus, who reserved all his best meat for the use of the Sabbath, grew by divine reward, so rich that his table, and all his table furniture, were of gold.

The following manner of honoring the Sabbath may not be said in English: *Dicunt cabalistæ quod qui uxorem suam cognovit in media noctis veneris adveniente Sabbato, et non aliter, prospera erit ei generatio, &c.*

Now, where men devoted themselves to the study of the law of Moses, as involved in the ten thousand observations and prohibitions that might be constructed on similar notions, it is evident that they lose sight altogether of the spirituality of God's precept, and their strict observances as dictated by rabbinical commentary, would not be an obedience to God's law, but to the precepts of men. And the system itself is so preposterously absurd, that no one can account for its establishment, but under the theory that they who devised, and they who revered it, were alike involved in the infatuation of a judicial blindness.

That the reader may have sufficient information to appreciate the judicial blindness of the Jewish nation, I shall now lay before him a long extract from the writings of Maimonides, who is indisputably the most intelligent of all the rabbinical writers. And, yet, notwithstanding this commendation, it is impossible not to be struck with the extraordinary blindness of the writer. This fact furnishes us with another proof of the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy on the wise and learned, for it is utterly incomprehensible how any one possessing so much intelligence on many points, should on others appear to be wholly deficient in the perception of what we must call mere common sense.

The extract I shall furnish is from Maimonides's views upon the perpetual obligation of the Law, by which he means not that delivered by Moses in the Pentateuch, but as including all those traditions, and doctrines, which have been added by the elders and rabbis.

The extract is further important as we may there distinctly see the exhibition of those delusive notions, by which the Jews rejected, and do still reject, Jesus of Nazareth, for Maimonides, who lived in the twelfth century, evidently directs his arguments against the founder of the Christian faith.

On the perpetual obligation of the Mosaic Laws, from the Yad Hachazakah of Maimonides.

"With regard to the law, it is clear and manifest that it is a commandment which is to last *for ever and ever*, and which does not admit of any alteration, diminution, or addition; for it is said: *what thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.** Deut. xii. 32. Again, it is said: *but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children FOR EVER, that we may do all the words of this law.* Deut. xxix. 29. Behold! this informs us, that with respect to all the words of the law, we are commanded to perform the same *FOR EVER*. Moreover, it is said, *An ordinance FOR EVER in your generations.* Numb. xv. 15. And, again it is said: *it is not in heaven, &c.* Deut. xxx. 12.

Behold! this informs us that no prophet is allowed to introduce, henceforth, any innovation. Should therefore any man arise, either from among the nations, or from among Israel, and perform any sign or wonder, and declare that the Lord has sent him to add any commandment, or to diminish any commandment, or to explain any of the commandments, in such a way as we have not heard from Moses;† or, if he were to say that the commandments which have been commanded to the Israelites, are not to last for ever, and from generation to generation, but that they were only temporary commandments, then, behold, that man is a *false prophet*, (for, behold, he came to deny the prophecy of Moses) and so he is to be destroyed by strangulation, in consequence of his having dealt proudly, by thus speaking in the name of the Lord, things which he has not commanded him; for he, blessed be his name! has on the contrary enjoined Moses, that this commandment should be unto us and our children *FOR EVER*, and *God is not a man that he should lie*.

But if so, why then is it said in the law, *I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren LIKE UNTO THEE?* (Deut. xviii. 18) By this it is not meant that he (the prophet) is to come to *establish* any new law, but only to *enjoin* the observation of the actual law, and to warn the people that they should not trespass against it;‡ just as the last of the prophets said, *Remember ye, the law of Moses my servant*, (Mal. iv. 4.) Moreover if he (the prophet) were to charge us with any thing respecting private matters, as for instance, go into that place, or do not go; join battle to-day, or do not join battle; build this wall, or do not build it; we are likewise commanded to hearken unto him.

And he who trespasses against his words, (i. e. of the prophet,) deserves to be destroyed by heaven, for it is said, *And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name. I will require it of him.* (Deut. xviii. 19.) Moreover a prophet who trespasses against his own words, or suppresses his prophecy, also deserves to be destroyed by heaven; and it is with regard to these three cases that it is said, *I will require it of him*.

Also if a prophet, whom we know to be a prophet, were to tell us that we should trespass against any one of the commandments stated in the

*True; and why did the elders and rabbis add to this law, and why did they diminish from it, by substituting their doctrines?

†Again we ask, why they do not apply their censure to their rabbis, who have added their traditions to this law, which was sanctioned by Jehovah?

‡And why have the rabbis trespassed against the law, by teaching a variety of observances that annul its evident import? What is the difference between formally repealing a law, and that of giving it a construction that contradicts its plain significance?

law, or even against several commandments whether they be slight or important ones *for a certain time only*; we are commanded to hearken unto him.*

And in this manner if any one of the prophets order us to transgress a commandment *temporarily*, we are commanded to hearken unto him, but if he say that the thing is to be broken *for ever*, he must be destroyed by strangulation, for the law says, *Unto us and our children forever.*—Deut. xxix. 29,

And in like manner, if he (the prophet) *propose to break any of the things which we have learned by tradition*,† or if he say with respect to any point of the law that the Lord has enjoined him that the matter should be decided so and so, or that in any rabbinical controversy the point ought to be decided by the opinion of such and such a person, then behold that man is a false prophet, and must be strangled, although he perform a sign, for, behold he came to give the lie to the law which says, *It is not in heaven*.‡ (Deut. xxx. 12.) But in temporary matters we must hearken unto him in every thing. See *Yad Hachazakah*, (translation,) pages 127 to 138.

But as if all this exposition be not enough to establish the perpetual obligation of the Law of Moses; Maimonides says in a previous chapter,

“And therefore if a prophet were to arise and perform great signs or wonders, but sought to deny the prophecy of Moses, our rabbi, (that is as expounded by the rabbis,) we should not hearken to him, but should know certainly that the signs were performed by enchantment or witchcraft, seeing that the prophecy of Moses, our rabbi, was not established by signs, so that we could compare the signs of this man with the signs

* I omit the reasoning of Maimonides and the rabbins upon this point, which is founded upon the fact of the prophet Elijah having offered a burnt offering on Mount Carmel, as is related in 1 Kings xviii. and which offering was prohibited by the law of Moses to be offered elsewhere than at the place of the ark of the Covenant.

† Where did Maimonides learn this doctrine? In what passage of the Scripture are the *traditions of the elders* thus exalted?

‡ *Note on the passage, It is not in heaven, by the editor of the Yad Hachazakah.*

The importance which the rabbins attach to this passage of Scripture, *It is not in heaven, &c.* is so great, that they go so far as to say, that it implies that God himself has renounced the right of ever interfering in the discussions of any of the commandments enjoined in the law, so that not only a prophet who should assume the right of deciding any rabbinical controversy on the alleged authority of inspiration, would be disregarded, but even a voice from heaven itself would be, and actually has been, disregarded in such instances.” In the Babylonian Talmud is related an occurrence of this kind, which we will abridge.

A controversy on some point of the law took place between rabbi Eleazar, and other rabbins, who rejected the opinion of Eleazar. Then said this last, If my opinion is true, let this carob-tree remove from its place, which the tree did accordingly several hundred cubits. If my opinion be true, says he, let this stream of water prove it, so the stream of water changed its course and flowed backwards. Then he said again to the rabbins, If the matter is to be decided by my opinion, let them prove it from heaven. So a voice from heaven went forth and said, “What will you have from rabbi Eleazar; according to his opinion matters ought to be decided in all instances.”

Notwithstanding all these miraculous signs, the rabbins rejected Eleazar’s opinion, under the authority of the passage, *It is not in heaven, &c.*

One of the rabbis, who encountered the prophet Elijah in his glorified state, asked him what did God do at the time that the rabbins disregarded his voice as above stated, and received from the prophet this answer, that God had laughed and said, *My children have triumphed over me! My children have triumphed over me!*

of the other, but we saw it with our own eyes, and heard it with our own ears, the same as Moses himself heard it.*

"And therefore," says Maimonides, "the law says, that if even the sign or the wonder come to pass, thou shalt still not hearken unto the words of that prophet, for behold this man comes to thee with a sign or wonder, to deny that which thou sawest with thine own eyes, and since we only believe signs in consequence of the commandment with which Moses has charged us, how then are we to receive the sign of him who comes to deny the prophecy of Moses, our rabbi, which we both saw and heard."

It must be evident from the preceding observations of Maimonides, that the foundation of all his reasoning is laid upon the ground that God had made an everlasting covenant with the Jewish people, that the law was of everlasting obligation upon them, and that it never could be abrogated. Upon this theory, therefore, he, as well as the other rabbis avow that they would hold any one a false prophet that should teach any doctrine contrary to this hypothesis, though he exhibited signs and wonders as miraculous evidence of a divine mission.

As the rabbis, however, under the term law of God, or law of Moses, do not mean the law, as published in the Pentateuch, but as also implying their traditional law, it is evident that we must separate the two. For, we admit that Jehovah did assign the written law as the basis of an everlasting covenant with the Jews. But, we deny that he has ever comprehended the traditions of the Jews, under the sanctions given to the observance of the written law; on the contrary, as far as we can discern the subject, he has denounced his judgments upon those that do observe and keep its ordinances as being the precepts of men.

Hence all Maimonides's arguments and quotations from Scripture, in which judgment was denounced against any departure from the observance of the law, are only applicable to the law *written* by Moses. The prophet who taught men to forsake and disregard the traditionary law, so far from being obnoxious to judgment for so doing, was doing an act we should suppose acceptable to Jehovah, by separating his law from the impertinent appointments and precepts of men, who, by his express command, were forbidden to add to, or diminish from, the requirements as published by Moses.

But, can any greater evidence of delusion be exhibited than in the preceding arguments of Maimonides. Jehovah had appointed a law, to which he had annexed particular sanctions. To this law, and directly contrary to a positive enactment, the rabbis add another law, which they make of equal obligation with the revealed law, and they then affirm the judgment of Jehovah is levelled against the infraction of their additional law.

Such a doctrine as this, though astounding in its absurdity, is surpassed by the one that declares if an individual should teach them to disregard this traditional law, that they would not believe, but that they would strangle him, even though he exhibited signs and wonders from heaven to confirm the truth of his mission.

Judicial blindness of the darkest kind must necessarily fall upon such teachers, and we may well omit any attempt to reason with persons who

* The rabbins profess to believe in the truth of their law, alone in the fact that God himself spoke to the whole nation or people from Mount Sinai.—Exod xix. 9.

As for the other miracles of Moses, they were not to convince unbelief, but were matters of necessity to the preservation of the people.—Yad Hachazakah. 122, &c.

announce they will neither listen to God or man, if he opposes their doctrines. Under such a delusion as this, there can be no difficulty in comprehending why the Jews rejected Jesus of Nazareth. His miracles, his pure doctrine, his confutation of their errors, all availed nothing. They revered their traditions, they had established a service of will-worship, Jehovah had abandoned them, and they were judicially blind. "The vision of the prophets had become to them as a book that was sealed," and the truth of God's judgment, as delivered by the prophet Isaiah, stands manifestly fulfilled.

Before I leave this subject, it may not be amiss to make a few remarks on the doctrine of the modern rabbis concerning the covenant that God made with their fathers through Moses. This covenant was not an everlasting or perpetual covenant in the absolute sense, it was so on certain conditions. If the Jews had observed and kept the law of Jehovah with faithfulness, then Jehovah's covenant with them would have been perpetual on his part, and he would have sustained them as his people, in the enjoyment of their privileges, until the consummation of all earthly things.

But the Jews did not observe the law of Jehovah, they broke it in every particular, and when he punished them for their disobedience, they nevertheless would not amend, but made themselves more and more disobedient, at last he cast them off, forsook them, disowned them for his people, and annulled the covenant on his part, as they had done on theirs.

There was, therefore, an end to the covenant by both parties, and where has Jehovah promised to *renew the covenant*, he made with the Jews by the hand of Moses.

It is true that Jehovah, in various places of the Scripture, says he will remember the covenant he made with their fathers, and that when the nation shall become sincerely repentant before him, that he will bring them back to their ancient country. But, in saying he will remember the covenant he made with their fathers, I presume no more is meant than that *he will forgive them*, as he promised he would, when they should become repentant, and that he would show mercy and kindness to them again, as he had repeatedly promised to do by the various prophets he sent them during their perverse and rebellious conduct.

That Jehovah shall bring back the Jews under *the ancient covenant* is no where promised in Scripture, that I know of, but on the contrary there are several passages in the prophetic writers that seem distinctly to assert that the Jews in their restoration shall be placed under a covenant different from that established by Moses, as the following quotations evidently imply.

"And it shall come to pass when ye be multiplied and increased in the land in those days, (the age of the Messiah,) saith the Lord, *they shall say no more the ark of the covenant of the Lord, neither shall it come to mind, neither shall they remember it, neither shall they visit it, neither shall that be done any more.*

At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered into it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem, neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart."—Jeremiah iii. 16, 17.

"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them saith the Lord.

But this shall be the covenant that I shall make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts,

and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.—Jeremiah xxxi. 31, 32, 33.

I presume the reader, by this time, can have no difficulty in appreciating the moral and intellectual condition of the Jewish people at the time of our Saviour's advent, and the motives that induced them to reject him as the Messiah. As Jehovah had foretold by the prophets, they had grieved his spirit so that his influences had been withdrawn from them, and they had been given up to follow their own perverse notions. They thus considered themselves as serving the Deity with great devotion, when they rigidly observed the presumptuous doctrines and ceremonies which their scribes and rabbis had so interlaced with the commandments of Jehovah, that any infraction of the heterogeneous system was considered a violation of what he had appointed. Under this delusion of their own creating, they were unwilling, *and as such were unable* to see the truth when manifested to them by Jesus Christ, and under the same delusion, all those that did see and obey, were persecuted by them. As the evidence, whether by the fulfilment of prophecy, or in the exhibition of miraculous power by Jesus Christ and his disciples, was totally disregarded by them, that they might sustain their pharisaical institutions, so Jehovah could not do more towards converting them than he had now done, unless by miraculously overpowering their stubborn unbelief. But this was not a part of his plan, he had made them free agents, free to stand, free to fall, he had borne with them, he had intreated them, he had punished them, during the space of sixteen centuries, and when in the consummation of all those preparations which he had made by the prophets for the advent of the Messiah, they now refused to listen to the miraculous proofs exhibited to them, and perversely referred them to demoniacal agencies. There was nothing further to be done, as had been said of their fathers, "the thing was without remedy," therefore their city and nation was given up to be destroyed, and the unhappy survivors being dispersed over the earth, went forth to fulfil the conditional punishments that had been foretold should befall them in case of their disobedience, and they have ever since, thus borne witness to the truth of that divine revelation, that Jehovah first condescended to their fathers, and which he now has made known to the Gentiles.

The Jews, in their present afflicted condition, are Jehovah's witnesses, as he told them they should be. If they had done right, their visible prosperity through manifest exhibitions of divine providence, would have made them joyful witnesses to the nations of the earth, of the power and truth of Jehovah. But as they were perverse and disobedient, they witness to the same truth with as much intensity, though they are sorrowful and afflicted. Jehovah chose them for his witnesses, and so they must continue, preserved by his power, until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled.

But though the Jews have been seemingly so remarkable a people in the moral history of mankind for their perverseness, for their will-worship, and for their judicial blindness; yet nevertheless I do not consider these traits to be of any national defect or constitution, but to characterize human nature. I believe the Jews to be neither better nor worse, nor in anywise different from ourselves, or any other nation under heaven. We are just as acceptable or offensive before Jehovah in our private and national religious doctrines and practices, as they were in proportion to the advantages we possess. Their history and the judgments upon them having been recorded from the first against them, for our benefit, should be an example to us of what the constitution of human nature is, that we may avoid their mistake and delusions. They have indeed ever been Jehovah's witnesses, and will be providentially

preserved by him until the fulness of time shall come. Then they shall once more be received into favor, and having become converted, they shall return to their own land in all prosperity and blessedness.

"Thus sayeth the Lord God: Behold! I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land.

And David my servant shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd, they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes and do them.

Moreover *I will make a covenant of peace with them, it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for ever more.*"—Ezekiel xxxviii. 21, 24, 26.

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